



# DEEP WATERS



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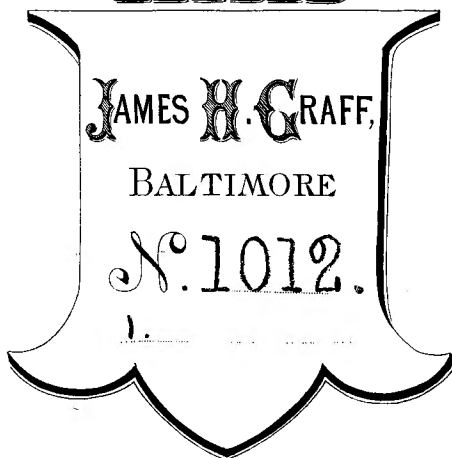
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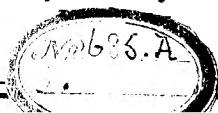
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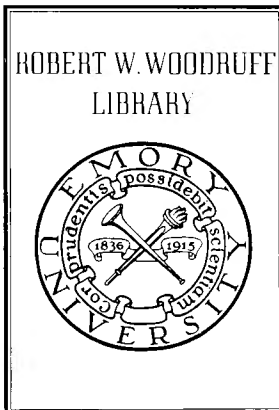
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Charles Lever.  
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# DEEP WATERS.

A *Nobel*.

BY

ANNA H. DRURY,

AUTHOR OF "MISREPRESENTATION," "FRIENDS AND FORTUNE,"  
"THE BROTHERS," ETC.

THIRD EDITION.

LONDON:

CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.

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# DEEP WATERS.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE HOME OF THE CLAVERINGS.

AN old family seat, known by name, and marked in the maps of many generations, is always an object of respect; but of respect mingled with melancholy, when it stands as a memorial of a family's decay. Lawleigh, the residence of the Claverings of —shire, had been in no other hands for five centuries; and as long as a Clavering existed, it would, if possible, be retained; but of the original wealth and consequence of the race, little else was left. The old house stood in its garden, with what had once been pleasure-grounds turned into paddock and potato fields; the timber mostly cut down, the broad acres in the possession of other landlords. Adversity of various kinds had brought down the fortune of the family as low as it could well go; and the small residue of income just allowed the worn-out master of Lawleigh to pass by the hearth of his ancestors the existence that would have had no comfort elsewhere. His father had struggled hard to mend matters; and, in the struggle, had sunk most of their last resources, as well as his own strength; and when he died, there were four descendants of the old stock sharing its poverty: his two sons, Henry and Rupert; Anne, the daughter of his deceased son Charles; and Edward Wilton, the son of his deceased daughter Ellen. Marriage had introduced no additional wealth into the family; Anne was a penniless orphan, dependent on her

uncles, and Edward's father, though high in the ranks of scholarship, was in worldly position only a London curate. Small chance of either being the favoured individual to rebuild the glories of the Claverings of Lawleigh. But as the last of the race, they were dearer to the brothers than all the world beside, and for them, at least, some new effort must be made.

'Brother,' said Rupert Clavering, when they came to arrange their affairs, 'it has come to this: one of us must go elsewhere and make a fortune, if fortunes are to be made. You are weak and ailing, and I am strong. My mind is made up. I shall go to Australia.'

This was in the comparatively early days of Australian emigration, and it sounded then like the daring of the old Cortez and Pizarro navigators. However, when a Clavering once made up his mind, it took a great deal to change it; and Rupert, with his small share of the paternal inheritance converted into a backwoodsman's outfit, sailed for the land that is the last hope of so many. He had never come back, though twenty years had slipped away; but from time to time he had sent money, to assist in the bringing-up of the two young people; and there was always a traditionary hope in their minds, that he would come home rich some day, and renew the good old times at Lawleigh. The new times, meanwhile, went on but hardly in that ancient mansion. Henry Clavering was in feeble health when he came into his heritage, and it gradually affected his mental powers. From the period that Anne left school, which she did at fifteen, she became the actual mistress of Lawleigh, and the guardian of its master. With two women-servants—one of them her own nurse—and an old man, whose age no one could fathom, for he had been old ever since they could remember, and talked of Master Henry and Master Rupert as if they were boys—she kept the establishment orderly, and the garden productive. Her own active hands took the lead in every homely duty, and acquitted themselves in a style worthy of those olden days when the yellow receipts were compiled, that amused her sometimes to decipher for the edification of Nurse Moyle: and as the house was too large for their needs, so many rooms were shut up, that the remainder was capable of being kept in order, even in elegance—as far as flowers and ladylike management could triumph over poverty. The carefully cultivated garden supplied them with fruit and

vegetables sufficient for their daily consumption, and a little to spare; the meadows afforded pasture for two cows, and the dairy was no light portion of the work that had to be got through. In this department Nurse Moyle was paramount, and her achievements were the glory of the household, and the admiration of the parish. In short, the lives of the five inhabitants of Lawleigh were, in a quiet English fashion, the parallel of the life the exiled Rupert and his fellows had been living in the bush: depending on the daily labour of their hands, subsisting on the produce of their soil, and with very little time or desire for the luxuries of the outer world, so that they might but hold their own, and owe no man anything.

But the period of a woman's life, between fifteen and twenty-five—especially when that woman is of an energetic, impulsive race, and with a refined natural taste—is not the one when all its aspirations can be satisfied by the colour of the Midsummer butter, or the weight of the Christmas pig. Mistress of herself, as far as necessity would allow her to be, Anne Clavering had no companion of her own sex but her nurse, and no books but what stood on the library shelves when she was born. Of these two resources she made ample use: her nurse taught her everything she knew herself, and treated her with that deference and loyalty that prevented her ever being anything less than Miss Clavering of Lawleigh: and as for the books, they grudged her nothing; they, too, told her all they knew, and she loved them as teachers are not always loved. She knew every curl of the old corners; was hand and glove with many an author of whom the subscribers to *Mudie* have never heard—many of them, very possibly, writers she might profitably have left alone—but she knew nothing about that, and welcomed all as they came—kites and daws as well as eagles—Helenus as well as Hector. The ancient novelists were all her friends. Unlikely, incredible as it may appear in the present day, it is nevertheless a fact, that she was deeply read in those recondite classics, Burney, Inchbald, Austen, and Edgeworth: nay, had even studied, and that right diligently, Sir Charles Grandison: while, alas! of the novels of her own period, she was most lamentably ignorant; depending solely for their acquaintance on such stray volumes of cheap editions, as travelled in Edward Wilton's pocket when he came to pay them a visit.

Had Edward Wilton but possessed the means, there would not have been many of the good things of life, whether in the shape of book or otherwise, that would have been denied to his Cousin Anne. Shillings were scarce as comets in his school-days: his holiday trip to Lawleigh was always by the cheapest conveyance, and the result of months of careful forethought and contrivance on his father's part; but somehow or other, there was always a treat stored up for her in his portmanteau of the kind she loved best. If he denied himself the expenditure of his weekly pence—they were not so many but that they might be counted—it was that he might have a book, a magazine, a woodcut of some popular picture—something to add to her intellectual store, and to the brightness of those dark eyes that were to him already the brightest in the world. And her pleasure in these dearly-bought luxuries more than repaid his self-denial. Shut up as she was at Lawleigh from all society—the civilities Mr Clavering could not return as he wished, he had long ago declined accepting—these visits of Edward's became of a value to the solitary girl, only equalled by his delight in paying them. Lawleigh was Arcadia to the young Londoner; and no amount of wealth could have given him more enjoyment than the country fare, the out-of-doors occupations—hard work as they were sometimes to his unpractised arm—the pettings and lectures of Nurse Moyle, the patronage of Old Thomas, always graciously disposed towards “Miss Ellen's boy,” but pitying the defects in his training—and Anne for his hostess, his companion, his pupil, and his teacher by turns. Time went on; he had left school, he had begun to work for his bread; he lost his father, and was alone in London, struggling up-hill with silent patience, and true Clavering stout-heartedness; but still, his holiday, when holidays were his, was spent nowhere but at Lawleigh, and the affection of the boy had grown, unawares, into the deep tenderness of the man, who has made his choice for once and for all.

That tenderness grew deeper as he perceived the effect that her secluded existence began to have on Anne's disposition. Early habits, healthy occupations and freedom, had given her a strong elastic frame, and active spirits, to which anything like morbid brooding would have been essentially foreign. But her mind began to crave something more than was within her reach; she secretly wearied of her every-day

routine, and longed for change, even if it should be for the worse. Not that any prospect would have allured her to forsake Uncle Henry in his feebleness; *that* she would have shrunk from as a sin; but the longing for something to stir the passionless depths of her life became so strong as to surprise herself afterwards, on looking back, when those depths were never to be passionless again.

The change came, as such changes generally do, when least looked for.

It happened one summer afternoon, in the end of July, that Anne Clavering was returning from a visit to a sick pensioner in a distant hamlet; a basket on her arm, much lighter than when she started, and her favourite water-spaniel, Bruno, for her guard and companion. Now, Bruno, favourite as he was, had one grievous fault, and that was his quarrelsome propensity. No lectures, no coaxing, could break him of the habit of looking upon every stranger as his natural enemy, and menacing him accordingly; though when once the first introduction was over, he was as pleasant an acquaintance as dog could be. On the present occasion, he paid dearly for this universal distrust of human nature. They were crossing a rustic bridge that spanned the beautiful little river, beloved of artists and fishermen, as it bounded along its rocky bed, when Bruno caught sight of an unknown figure coming to meet them, evidently to cross the bridge in his turn. He pricked up his ears, and growled disapprovingly. His mistress's rebuke quieted him for a moment, till the stranger, an athletic young fellow, in light pedestrian attire, with a small knapsack and sketching-book slung on his shoulders, began to twirl a stout stick round his wrist, as he walked to the whistled accompaniment of "*La donna e mobile*." This was more than Bruno could or would put up with. Off he set at full speed, and flew open-mouthed at the legs of the traveller; who recoiled a step, and then threw himself into an alarmingly hostile attitude. Anne shrieked to him to forbear, but her voice was drowned in Bruno's bark, and all her haste could not bring her to the spot in time to prevent the evil she dreaded. One blow of the stick, dealt by that powerful young arm, had been quite enough, and Bruno lay yelling on the ground with a broken leg. Anne dropped her basket, and threw herself beside her favourite, sobbing with grief and breathlessness.

'Oh, my dog, my dog, you are dreadfully hurt! Why



did you not mind me? And how could you, sir, be so cruel? I begged you not—it is only his way with strangers—he never hurt any one in his life. You have killed my dear old dog. I am sure you have!’

‘I sincerely trust not; I shall never forgive myself,’ replied the young man, whose passion had cooled directly the blow was given, and who was full of consternation at the result. ‘I really did not intend to do him an injury; but he took me by surprise, and I was rather too hasty. I am exceedingly sorry. What can I do?’

His voice and manner were gentlemanly and sincere, and Anne’s indignation in some degree subsided; especially when he knelt on the grass by Bruno, and with a quiet, soothing hand, which the dog submitted to without resistance, began to examine the state of the leg. He shook his head over it, however, and looked up at Miss Clavering with an air of deep concern. ‘It is broken, certainly; I would a great deal rather have smashed my own; but I hope it can be set, and that he will recover. May I ask if you have far to go?’

‘Oh no; my home is near at hand, through this plantation. But how is he to crawl there?’

‘He shall not crawl a yard; with your permission I will carry him, but we must first sling his leg. Poor fellow—there, good dog. You are a beauty, there is no doubt of that, and of true mettle, by your bearing no malice.’

Anne could only gratefully accept this service; indeed, she felt he could do no less, and it would have been rather hard work without his help. He contrived, in a very handy way, to put poor Bruno in a tolerably easy position, and carried him as tenderly as if he had been a child, again expressing his remorse as they walked on. Anne begged him to forgive himself, as she did, heartily; indeed, now she thought of it, she had to apologize for the unprovoked assault on Bruno’s part. He had often been corrected for the bad habit, but it was now past curing.

‘Like many other bad things,’ said the stranger, ‘only left off when the opportunity of doing them ceases. I have often found exemplary reformed characters owing their improvement to that simple cause. Perhaps, however, I may have cured Bruno this time, in which case I may hope my hastiness will be really overlooked in the benefit.’

‘It certainly will,’ said Anne, ‘but it is always a slow

process to be grateful for a sharp cure. If faults and bad habits could be knocked out of us with a stick and an arm like yours, I wonder which of us would have moral strength to court the operation.'

'It can hardly concern *you*,' he said, smiling, 'but I have no scruple in saying that I, for one, would rather let it alone. A complete cure would not leave me a bone in my skin.'

They were just entering the plantation; Anne held the gate open for her companion. He bowed his head as he passed her.

'What a pretty country this is of yours!' he cried. 'I have been walking about it the last three days, and never was so charmed with any scenery in all my life. There is no sort of travelling, after all, like going on foot, and alone.'

'Rather more spirited than sociable, is it not?'

'By no means: rest is never so sweet, and society is never so agreeable, as on a solitary tramp, where they only occur as luxuries.'

'Well,' said Anne, 'I have often envied gentlemen their independence of encumbrances on such occasions, I must confess. It must be very pleasant to go where you will, instead of where you must.'

'I admire your spirit,' he returned, quickly; 'and after all, travelling, like life, does not consist in flying from one place to another, but in getting as much entertainment as you can on the way. So long as the road is pleasant, what does it matter where it goes?'

The audacious smile with which this was asked, made Anne shake her head. 'Do you find that a safe theory?' she asked, not quite certain how he meant to be understood.

'Safe? I should think not, indeed. It would not be worth holding if it were.'

They walked a little farther in silence; Anne pondering unconsciously on his words, and wondering what Edward would think of them; till observing him shift his load as if to ease his right arm, civility made her ask if he had walked far that day?

'I have not an idea,' said he, 'for I have been on my legs ever since daybreak; but I never measure my journey by distances, only by events.'

'Then you must be tired; or is it a point of etiquette never to acknowledge that weakness?'

'Not at all: I own I am a little tired, but I think as much from vexation as anything else. Nothing is so easy as to make a fool of yourself, and nothing is such hard work.'

'I think you are beginning to wish you had kept to the ordinary style of travelling.'

'I wonder you should; it would be very strange if I did at this moment. Really,' before she had time to show any displeasure at the compliment, 'this is all uncommonly pretty. Whose property is it?'

'It is now Mr Maberley's: it belonged formerly to the Lawleigh estate.'

'Lawleigh? Mr Clavering's, you mean?'

'Yes, my uncle. I am Miss Clavering.'

He concealed his start under a bow of acknowledgment.

'The name seems well known in the country,' he said, politely. 'I have heard it mentioned too often not to remember it.'

He did not think it necessary to explain that it had been generally coupled with the remark it was fast going to the dogs. Anne had fewer scruples.

'In former times,' she said, 'you might have heard a great deal about it, for I believe the greater part of the surrounding property belonged to the family: but, like many others, the honour of the remembrance is all that is left. My uncle lives a very retired life, and we keep rather primitive hours. You are, I conclude, a stranger in these parts?'

'Quite. I know something of Mr Maberley, but I was never here before. My name you may, perhaps, be familiar with—it is Atterbury.'

'Oh, of course I have read of the Bishop of Rochester.'

'Of course you have: but that will not help us much, for we claim no relationship with the right reverend prelate. I doubt if we have a single peg on which to hang a claim to historical honours. Our fame is built of grosser materials—pounds, shillings, and pence—rubbish, of course, but not to be despised, Miss Clavering, when you can get nothing better.'

'No,' said Anne, 'nor when you cannot get anything half so good, as is our case sometimes.'

'Don't regret it: your family name and position in the

county are worth all the money. If my father were but a country gentleman, instead of a London banker (you cannot pretend not to have heard of Atterbury and Co.), I should have a chance of living, instead of turning into a calculating machine. I detest business, and it is my fate to be tied down to it.'

'You do not seem to have suffered much yet,' remarked the young lady, good-humouredly.

'For a very excellent reason, Miss Clavering: I have had nothing to do with it yet. I have a year's liberty still to enjoy, before I put my neck into the golden yoke: and I am making the most of it, though poor Bruno may not appreciate the result.'

Poor Bruno! He certainly bore no malice, notwithstanding his infirmity of temper; for, except a plaintive whine every now and then, he endured the journey with wonderful patience, and showed no signs of fear or dislike to the strong arms that were doing their best to make him amends. As for Anne, though she had conversed on other matters from a sense of politeness, she was too anxious about her favourite not to be thankful when they reached her uncle's gate; Old Thomas was working in the garden, and his aid being called for, Bruno was carried into the kitchen, laid on the dresser, and all the surgical skill of the family put in requisition. Anne's heart was touched by the feeling showed by Mr Atterbury. He took all the blame on himself, apologizing to Thomas, to Sally, to Nurse Moyle, in terms that appeased them all; and what was more to the purpose, his steadiness, and neatness of hand, in binding up the leg, materially assisted the operation. When all was done that their united experience (each having a private opinion, more or less opposed to the rest) could devise and agree upon he was beginning to take his leave: but, by this time, Mr Clavering had been informed of the circumstance, and a courteous message invited him to rest, and take some refreshment. As this was just what he had been hoping for, he allowed himself to be pressed into accepting, and Anne conducted him to her uncle's apartment. What his impressions of that first visit were, may best be told by himself in an extract or two from his correspondence, to which we must devote another chapter.

## CHAPTER II.

WHAT MR ATTERBURY THOUGHT.

*Frederick Atterbury, Esq., to John Despard, Esq.*

‘ To confess the truth, after what I had heard of this old decayed family remnant, vegetating in pride and poverty on their hearthstone sooner than leave it, I was rather more curious to see than anxious to share in the details of their *ménage*. I pictured it to myself, something between Bareacres and Eugénie Grandet, with a slight dash of Caleb Balderstone; and being on my best behaviour, after the mischief I had done. I was prepared to eat bad salt butter and leaden bread without a murmur, to look impressed if stately covers were taken off dishes of emptiness, and if I heard a crash, or a thunder-storm came on, to believe implicitly that an accident had spoiled all the *entrées*, and the electric fluid had turned the beer. You, who know me, will allow there was no small amount of heroism in such a state of mind. Unluckily—for such heroic impulses are not to be got up every day—it was all wasted. I never was more comfortable in my life.

‘ The room into which Miss Clavering conducted me was, in fact, the hall; but being oak-panelled, with a large handsome fireplace, has long been used as a parlour, and I soon ascertained that it was the only apartment ever sat in, except a little room where the young lady received her poor people and kept her stores. The other rooms were shut up; only now and then opened for dusting and cleaning, against, as she told me, “Uncle Rupert’s return.” This uncle in Australia, it seems, is to bring no end of money, and to do great things. It is a happy delusion; I would not contradict her. We have all uncles in Australia in some shape or other. I wish *mine* would look sharp about coming home.

‘ If this much-desired relative resembles his brother and niece, the Claverings are a handsome race. Anne’s grandmother was a Spanish beauty; and there is no mistake about the tint of her olive complexion and the deep shade of her eyes, though her carriage and manner are straightfor-



ward and English, without an atom of the charming coquetry of the young ladies of Seville. Mr Clavering is a small, thin, kind, picturesque old gentleman, with scanty white locks and regular features, and the most perfect simplicity of heart and speech. He welcomed me as graciously as if he had been his Grace of Lawleigh, letting me know at once that he made an exception in my favour to his rule of not receiving visitors; and then, without the least effort, making it appear that my visit was one of the kindest things I had ever done in my life. My contrite apologies for my misdeemeanour were received just in the same way. True, I had maimed the dog of a Clavering, and therefore the Claverings generously forgave me; but, on the other hand, I had more than compensated for it by affording them this gratification, and doing them this honour. It was like a chapter in an old story, and I soon found myself bowing and speech-making, like a chevalier of the old *régime*.

‘Meanwhile, a sumptuous tea was being set out; Miss Clavering, without any attempt at concealment, aiding in its arrangement. Once in a twelvemonth or so, there is nothing so perfect as a tea of this sort after hard exercise; and by this time I was hungry enough to have eaten up my friend Bruno, splints and all. And here were poached eggs, and fried ham, and excellent butter, and delicious bread, and fruit, and cream, and preserves, and an unlimited allowance of hot tea. I was relieved of my worst anticipations, and made the *amende* by doing the repast justice.

‘Mr Clavering, I saw, watched my progress with serene satisfaction, and, by way of seasoning the viands, entertained me with some interminably long stories of old times, of which, as I could not make head or tail at the time, you will not require me to give a distinct report now. The gist of the whole was to impress on my understanding that nothing was ever so wise, or great, or honourable, as the Claverings in their best days—except the Claverings in their worst. Certainly, they carried off their adversity well if this was their ordinary style of living; but that I had reason to doubt. I suspect they made a gala for me out of all their best stores: for it transpired, accidentally, but without causing any sensation, that Miss Clavering made the butter I found so good, and helped to make the bread; that the fruit was reared by the industry of the whole party; and that the sale of the different articles of produce was one

of their few resources. I could have made sure Anne Clavering was accustomed to work by the look of her hands. Coarse, do you say? Not a whit—they were as ladylike as could be, but there was a firmness and spring about the touch of the fingers that spoke of energy and strength, such as our fair friends can seldom boast. Not in the least, mind you, was she ashamed of her usefulness, neither did she glory in it; indeed, she owned once that she should be heartily glad, sometimes, if she had people to do it for her.

‘Everything about them, I plainly saw, indicated their condition past and present. The spoons were silver, with the family crest, but worn by time to attenuation; the table-linen was of fine damask, all over delicate darns—Miss Clavering’s bright eyes must have spent a great deal of light over such stitches; the furniture was so antique it was hard to tell what the original pattern of the chair-covers could have been, or what the pristine hues of the carpet, which, by its size, must have been costly once. As to dress, the young lady’s was of the plainest and simplest order, and the old gentleman’s as ancient and neat as himself.

‘I was so taken with all this, so different in every way to what one is used to meet in the world, that I felt very reluctant to go. To my great relief, just as I was making up my mind to take leave it really did come on to thunder, and lighten, and pour with rain; and the good old man would not hear of my going any farther—I must honour them by accepting a bed. I did accept, after a slight resistance, and Miss Clavering soon left the room to play the housemaid’s part, I felt convinced, in my service; while in return, I played chess in hers with her uncle. How I did bother his game, to be sure!

‘It was an hour before she came in again, during which, I believe, I had risen in Mr Clavering’s opinion many degrees, by my play. For once in my life, one of my accomplishments was of use to me. I could see by her face she had been hard at work, but, of course, could not say a word to imply that they had not bed-rooms at their command. I only discovered afterwards that it had been a good hour’s heavy labour to arrange everything as I found it when I went to bed—fresh, clean, and inviting, with a little fire, which, in spite of its being July, was made acceptable by the rain and the coldness of the house. Really, it struck like a vault, going through the uninhabited passages; and I

doubted whether I had not escaped Caleb Balderstone to fall into the hands of Aldobrand Oldenbuck. However, no ghost disturbed my rest, except those raised by day-dreams. How early Miss Clavering rose next morning I cannot say; some hours, I fear, before I did; and to most efficient purpose, for our breakfast was as sumptuous as the tea had been, and my appetite was so uncompromising, I felt positively ashamed. Bruno was doing well, and like a mag-nanimous dog that he is, received my attentions in as friendly a spirit as they were given, which is saying a great deal. I took his likeness for his mistress, and, on the sly, took hers too; but this she did not find out. At noon I forced myself to take leave, first obtaining permission when I came that way again, to call and inquire, nominally, after my victim patient. It was given me in his name; and long life to old Bruno, say I, for as long as he lives I will keep up a visiting acquaintance with him. I owe that yelp of his one of the pleasantest visits I ever paid, at any rate, if I never pay another.

‘I wrote the above a week ago, and forgot to send it. I don’t know what has come over me, but I can settle on no plan, and have already broken as many engagements as the said week has days. I can’t make up my mind to go out of the country without another call at that house. The truth is, Despard, that face of Anne Clavering’s will not let me rest! I had no idea I was in for this—but, see her again I must, and I will. I can hear your whistle as you read this. Don’t be alarmed. It is the fifteenth time I have been in love, and here I am still to tell the tale; though I have never yet seen a woman like Anne Clavering, and question if I ever shall. I am off in half an hour. Bruno—my benison on his leg—must be my excuse for returning so soon.

‘Well, Jack, I paid my visit, and though my return caused some surprise, there was no displeasure to daunt me. I rather hoped I saw the reverse. At any rate, I had been thought of in my absence. Mr Clavering had never ceased pondering over our last game of chess, and wishing for another; and Nurse Moyle had repeated scores of times, it did her heart good to see a young gentleman enjoy his meals as I did. Bruno was limping, but amiable; he knew me again directly, and we renewed our vows of eternal regard, though I gave him a private caution, that if his leg got well too fast, I should break it again. Anne—I could not ex-

tract an acknowledgment that she had thought of me at all—but her hand was cordial and her smile pleasant; never was such a smile on any woman's face! I felt at home directly I got into the oak-panelled hall, whose smell had haunted me ever since I left; and the only drawback to my enjoyment was the difficulty I could not overlook, of getting up a sound ostensible excuse for being in it constantly. Why had I not broken my own leg instead of Bruno's while I was about it, and then I must have remained there to be nursed? As it was, I knew there was pride enough in both uncle and niece to make it incumbent on me to be wary. Any attempt at intrusion would have been met with a prompt repulse, as had been the case once before with some ill-advised visitors, who thought they would patronize the decayed gentry. Luckily for me, there came in while I was there the old parson of the parish, a great ally of the Claverings, and a keen brother of the angle. We made friends at once, and he gave me an invitation to his house for as long as I chose to stay. I jumped at the offer, and am writing now from his parlour. I have been here the best part of a week, and have seen Anne every day. I have just heard that there is some good shooting to let for the season hereabouts; it would be a sin to let it slip, as it is going for a mere song. If you see my father, just put him up to that fact, there's a good fellow. I have some remains of conscience, and have run rather fast over the ground this year; but this is such a glorious chance. Pave the way for me—you know what I mean. She will make me the happiest fellow in the world.'

It is to be opined that the paving suggested above was skilfully done, for the result was that Frederck Atterbury took the shooting he wished for, and though obliged to leave Helstone Parsonage after a reasonable visit had been paid, came back to the neighbourhood for the first of September. He had early ascertained that nothing was so acceptable to Mr Clavering as game, and the youngest and plumpest birds were sure to find their way into the larder at Lawleigh. Of course, a tired sportsman bringing his offering was to be welcomed hospitably, and Atterbury was apt to grow tired as soon as he had birds enough for an excuse, leaving the supply necessary to satisfy London claims to be provided by the keeper. And so, week after week, the ac-

quaintance between him and Anne ripened, and grew strong; and the young man's admiration became a passion, and the solitary girl found a dazzling vista opened in the midst of her common-place routine of tranquil usefulness. At what stage of the acquaintance she first admitted young Atterbury to the chief place in her heart she never knew—she was long before she knew that he was there—but from their first meeting life had assumed a different aspect, and before she even dreamed of danger, her citadel was taken, and her garrison disarmed.

Time passed on, and still he came and went; there was always some excuse to be found for his reappearance; he had come down for a week's hunting, or a few days' fishing, or a sketching tour; it did not much signify, as whatever he came to do, he contrived to leave undone, and devote his hours to Lawleigh and Anne. And the neighbourhood began to talk of it, and Edward Wilton grew uneasy at the frequent recurrence of his name in her letters; and last, and slowest of all, Uncle Henry began to open his eyes, and ask himself, what made that pleasant young man call so often?

'I have something to tell you, Anne, my love,' he said, in his mild, deliberate manner, as she came into the hall one bright spring day, bearing the produce of a good morning's cowslipping in her basket; 'something you will be rather sorry to hear. Mr Atterbury has been sitting with me for an hour.'

'Has he, indeed, Uncle Henry? Well, I do not know why I should be sorry, since you like his company so much. You always say how agreeable he is.'

'So I do, my love; but then you missed seeing him at all.'

'Well, dear, and if I did? He will call again soon, no doubt; so it does not much matter.' Not but what it did, only Miss Clavering was not going to own it.

'No, very true, my love; as you say, it does not matter at all; only—I was going to tell you—he is not coming back.'

'Not coming back?' Her careless manner was gone now, and she looked at him with suspended breath.

'No—at least not for a very long time. He is going to take seriously to business, he says, and has promised his father he will be idle no longer. A very sensible promise



for a young man to make, if he only will keep it. I am sorry you missed him, my love—you would have liked to wish him good-bye, and he could not wait any longer, as he had to call at the parsonage.'

'The parsonage? then there is time still,' she said, with a flush of hope, and hastily snatching up a bunch of cowslips, she was gone before her uncle could interfere, or indeed look round.

He sat after she left him, for some time, quite still; his hands resting on his stick, and his eyes fixed on the door. The vague doubts, fears, and resolutions, that had floated through his brain for weeks and months past, were forming themselves now into a tangible shape; and at length, by an impulse he could no more resist than explain, he rose, took his garden-hat from its peg, and followed her into the garden. She was not there, and something made him reluctant to call her, so on he went, without asking himself why, in the direction of the parsonage.

He had not very far to go.

There was an old stile, with a wide step, leading from one of his fields into the plantation of Mr Maberley, on which his own name and his brother's were cut, with many more, to which there was now no response in this world. It commanded the best view of the house, and for the sake of the old associations it called up, had been patched, repaired, and cherished, as a relic of the family whose decay had gone on still faster than its own—like them, too, preserving a sturdy steadfastness to the last. And by that stile, with her back to her home, his niece Anne was standing, her hand clasped in those of Frederick Atterbury, leaning on the rails from the other side. There they stood in the light of the April sunshine, as if there were no world but that spot and themselves—divided by the boundary rails, as fate was dividing them that hour—yet holding each other as firmly as if to defy his power to sever; forgetting everything past, present, and to come, except that they were still together, and were soon to part.

How long they would have stood there, and he have stood watching them, it were hard to say; but the striking of the church clock reminding them of the hour, they had to take leave suddenly at last—Atterbury bending one moment over Anne's hand, and then turning hastily away, and disappearing in the plantation.

Anne remained alone, so absorbed in her own thoughts as not to hear the faltering steps that toiled so wearily along the rough pathway to reach her, so that she was not a little startled to find her uncle by her side. Even the bound of her pulse could scarcely deepen the glow of her cheeks, but the anxious, distressed, almost timid inquiry in his eyes, brought into her own the tears she had kept from Frederick Atterbury. She clung round him as if she had been still the child he had so often lifted over that very stile, and the story of her life was told in a moment.

‘Oh, Uncle Henry! he loves me—he told me so. He will have to work first, before he comes to ask your consent, and he did not mean to tell me yet, but it came before he was aware, and he loves me so very, very dearly. You are not angry, are you?’

‘No, my love, but I am tired, and—and I wish your Uncle Rupert was here. Let us go in.’

And in they went together, and she helped him to his usual seat in the corner, and placed the stool for his feet, and stroked down his hair, and poured out all her visions of the future; how she should try and improve herself in every art and accomplishment, to be more fit for Frederick’s wife, and how, when they were as rich as he said they should some day be, they would repair and new furnish dear old Lawleigh, provide for the servants—give handsome presents to Mr Wynne and the church—make Cousin Edward’s fortune, and write for Uncle Rupert, that they might all be happy together.

He let her go on unchecked, listening mechanically with the assenting smile he was accustomed to give to all she suggested or foretold; but more than once that evening—on many evenings afterwards—when sitting in his usual attitude, leaning his hands on his cane, she was startled to hear him murmur, in a tone of sorrowful anxiety, ‘I wish Rupert was come home!’

## CHAPTER III.

## WHAT UNCLE RUPERT FOUND WHEN HE CAME.

TIME passed on, and Uncle Rupert came home at last.

It was on a fine afternoon in the beginning of June, just at the height of the Crimean war, that Edward Wilton, now a Government official, was waiting at the Waterloo terminus for the Southampton train; that was to bring this long-looked for, long-loved, and almost unknown relation and friend. His heart was full of hopes and fears, as every young heart must be under such circumstances; the Uncle Rupert with whom he had corresponded ever since he could shape a letter, he understood thoroughly, and could see as vividly as if they had lived under one roof; but would the visible, tangible Uncle Rupert be the same man? His letters were all kindness—would his manners be the same? Would he be disappointed in what he found—would he expect better looks, greater talents, and a host of other agreeable qualifications which Edward felt himself without? It was possible, and Edward had plenty of time to torment himself with the possibility, from the unpunctuality of the train. Self-torment was only too easy to his diffident, sensitive nature, impressed as he was with a low opinion of himself, continually kept lower by more tenderness of conscience than is very common at his time of life. Slightly made, fair, and quiet in demeanour, he looked younger than he really was, and often found himself treated accordingly; a circumstance that went far to keep up the nervous self-mistrust, which his good sense told him was weakness, and against which his conscience sometimes protested, as only a more specious form of pride.

Early habits of industry, patience, and self-denial had, however, given to his face a steadfast expression, which to those who took the trouble of observing it, marked him as a man to be depended upon, notwithstanding his boyish exterior. Care and sorrow, and anxious affection, too, had been at work there, and had left on his features the stamp so often found on a woman's—the mark peculiar to those who bear the burdens of others.

The weight had lately become almost too much, and it

added to the anxiety with which he watched for his uncle's arrival, that he was the only individual entitled to assist him in bearing it. How little the traveller knew of the endless matters deferred till his coming! And what if, when he did come, he should not prove the wise, indulgent, powerful friend they had been brought up to consider him? In such a case, what, Wilton thought, would become, not of himself, but of Anne?

Suspense was nearly at an end on one point at any rate. The bell began to ring, the porters to bestir themselves, the watchers to vibrate with expectation. A few minutes more, and the rush and roar were upon them, and every carriage was pouring out its liberated captives. Bronzed faces and big beards there were many, for invalids from the East were coming home by every boat; and among these Edward was still seeking the face he felt he should recognize, when a voice, strangely familiar, asked close to his ear, 'Is not that Edward Wilton?'—'Yes, yes,' he replied, breathlessly, even before he could discern who spoke—'is that Uncle Rupert?' and he felt his hands grasped with a vigour that left no doubt on the matter. His sight became clear as he warmed to the animating pressure, and he saw before him a small, spare, sunburnt man, with grey hair and frank keen eyes—the outline of whose features sufficiently resembled those he knew and loved so well, to make the contrast of the general effect the more striking.

'I thought there could be no mistake about Ellen's profile; I should have known her son among a hundred. Do you think you should have known *me*?'

'I think so now, sir; but, to tell you the truth, I was looking for you among those—'

'Those bearded fellows, were you? Well, you will not make such a mistake again; not but what you might have paid me a worse compliment. Now I have found you, let us make ourselves of use. This way.'

He worked through the crowd with the dexterity of youth, and regained the door of the carriage he had just left, in which one of his fellow-travellers was still seated.

'I have found my nephew, Captain, and now let us help you out. Here, Edward, take this gentleman's bag, will you? and if he will lean on my arm—'

'You are too good—the porters will attend to me presently, when they have time to think of the baggage,' said

the person addressed, a young man, shrunken by sickness, and crippled with wounds, but speaking as cheerfully as if it was all a matter of course. 'Pray don't trouble yourself about me.'

'Will you not honour us, then, by accepting our services, sir? My nephew and I have not met since he was in petticoats, but I can tell, without asking him, that we are feeling alike at this moment.'

The invalid smiled as he looked from one to the other; the sights that moved everybody's heart in England had been so common in the East, he could hardly understand the amount of sympathy displayed, but he received it with good humour, as kindly meant. 'Since it must be, well and good,' he said, 'but it is rather like handling a superannuated doll, I can tell you. Everything about me is in the place of something else. I don't know the least where my own bones are, so I do not see how you should.'

It was a trying task to lift him out, poor fellow, and the perspiration rolled off his haggard face as they did so, though he joked all the time. Uncle Rupert carried him himself into the waiting-room, and Edward fetched him what he whispered he had been longing for—a bottle of porter.

'I dare say it is the worst thing I could touch,' he said, as he drained the tumbler; 'but I have been touching worst things so long, I do not believe in them now. By George, what prime stuff! Now, do look after your luggage, Mr Clavering, or I can tell you you won't get it.'

'My servant is attending to that; I shall not leave you till I see you safe in the hands of your friends. Whom do you expect?'

'I don't expect anybody. Who could expect a dear old woman to come all the way— By George, there she is, though!' He involuntarily tried to spring up. 'No, that will not do—oh, what a baby I am!' The tears were running down his face, partly from excitement, partly from pain. Wilton was starting off, but was called back. 'Stop a bit, sir—one minute. Don't let her be startled; she has no more nerve than a rabbit, I know. Look here; would you mind going up to her as if you had known her all your life, and had got some very pleasant news—you see her, don't you?—and just ask if she is looking for Captain Sydney? and if, by great good luck, she doesn't fall into your arms in a fit, ask her to excuse my not coming after

her, as I am still a little lame? Thank you; upon my honour, you are too good to take so much trouble.' Then, as Wilton ran off, 'A little lame still—rather a mild way of putting it, when one's legs are dissected maps in boxes that don't fit. Thank you, sir,' as Uncle Rupert gave him another tumbler of porter; 'there is one advantage in being like Baron Munchausen's horse—I can take any quantity without inconvenience.'

Any one who recollects the choking sensation with which the wounded of that great struggle—our own heroic age—were looked upon for the first time in England, will understand how ill-disposed Uncle Rupert felt to respond with equal cheerfulness. He had seen wounds and casualties in plenty in Australia, and had no nervous susceptibilities on that score; but he had never before seen a young man shattered from one of England's battle-fields, and it made him feel like a child. When, after a short interval, Edward returned, with an elderly lady on his arm, thin, flushed, trembling, all one flutter of body and soul, who came with arms extended, as if she hardly knew what she was doing, and covered her grandson with her embraces, as if to shelter him from all eyes but her own, both uncle and nephew, by a simultaneous impulse, made a rush for the passage, where they stood, the elder blowing his nose fiercely, the younger more quietly passing the back of his hand across his eyes.

'How can you be such a fool, Edward?' said Uncle Rupert, as soon as he could speak. 'You are no better than a girl, and a silly girl, too. Your Cousin Anne would be worth a dozen of you, I'll be bound.'

'Very true, sir; so she is.'

'I tell you what, Edward; that fellow Nicholas is gone to his account, so I will not curse the dead; but if there are any living who are accountable for this—'

'Don't, sir, don't. He did his duty, and there are hundreds more in the same condition, or worse.'

'I know there are. Does that comfort me, do you think? That I should have seen such a sight as this the first day of my return to England! He has been talking on the way, telling me things he thought nothing of, but that made me——there, this won't do; hang your dust, it makes one's eyes and nose tingle like snuff. We will just see if they want our services, Edward, and then we will be off.'

They found Mrs Sydney and her grandson sitting hand

in hand, both too much spent with the meeting to attempt much more exertion; so Wilton, having ascertained she had a maid-servant and a fly waiting, lost no time in finding them; and with the help of some sturdy porters, whose zeal and tenderness brought another of those half sad, half amused smiles to the lips of the invalid, he was carried into the vehicle, his small kit deposited on the top, and his grandmother and her attendant supporting him inside.

'You will come and see us, Mr Clavering, will you not? What's the name of the place, granny? Southernwood Cottage, St John's Wood. You'll recollect that. "In a cottage near a wood" sounds rural, doesn't it? We shall have to stay there a bit before we go north. You'll try and call if you are in town?'

'That I will,' said Uncle Rupert, as he pressed the hand the old lady silently held out, and stood with his hat off till the fly rolled out of sight. 'That I will,' he repeated, as if thinking aloud, 'and would, if half a dozen Russian regiments stood in the way—ah!'

There was a vindictiveness about that last interjection that was anything but Christian; but it was a temper in which British Christians indulged rather freely just at that period, and not against Russian regiments alone.

'Where is your luggage, uncle?'

'Do you see a long-legged fellow in a straw hat anywhere about?'

'In a straw hat—yes, there is one at the other end of the station.'

'Very well; then there is my luggage. Adam knows it is as much as his head is worth not to have everything correct. Come and see. You do not suppose I keep a fellow to loaf about with his hands in his pockets, do you?'

'But are you sure that he, a stranger, can manage it all alone?'

'My dear young man, if I had not good reasons for knowing that he could, should I let him do it?'

'Well, uncle, it would not be like the character I have always heard of you, certainly. Have you had him long?'

'Some five years. He came to me on ticket-of-leave.'

'Oh!' said Edward.

'Yes, and turned out the best servant a man ever had. I got his pardon, and he has come home to redeem his good name.'

Wilton said nothing; humanity and discretion told him he had no right to interfere: nevertheless, he secretly resolved to keep a private watch over this reformed character if he was to be in attendance on Anne. He could not but confess his powers had not been over-estimated, when he saw a cab waiting with Mr Clavering's luggage piled on it, and the tall dark servitor in the straw hat holding the door open.

'Everything correct, of course, Adam.'

'Of course, sir. One—two—three—and four. Where to, if you please, sir?'

'Where, Edward?'

'Great College Street, Westminster.'

'Any one waiting for us there?' asked Uncle Rupert, hurriedly, pausing with his foot on the step.

'Anne and her nurse. You do not know, perhaps—'

His uncle looked quickly round—met his eyes, and glanced from them to his crape hatband.

'I was afraid to ask which it was,' he said, 'and yet I was sure—my brother?'

'Yes, uncle, two months ago.'

'I knew it—I felt it,' was the reply, as the traveller entered the cab, and turning away from his companion, kept his face concealed for the greater part of the drive. The rattle of wheels and stones would have prevented conversation had he been ever so disposed towards it, and by the time they had entered one of the quieter streets in Lambeth, he had regained composure and voice.

'I was prepared for this, Edward; I was sure, from the last accounts, that he was going, and I had scarcely a hope of seeing him again. If I only could have arranged to come sooner—but I tried to do all for the best. *His* will be done. How is Anne, poor girl?'

'She has been out of health lately, and since this last grief, lost her strength entirely. She was ordered complete change, and preferred London to any other.'

'Is she the better for it?'

'I hope she will be, now you are come. We have wanted you badly enough. Uncle, I must just observe that in your absence I have been obliged to assume a certain amount of responsibility in all the affairs: I hope you will be satisfied—but if not, that you will forgive.'

'My boy, with only three of us left what shall we do if we cannot rely on each other? Wait till we are out of this



racketing whirligig, and then we will talk. What on earth have you been doing here?' as the cab crept over Westminster Bridge behind a string of vehicles.

'Only building a few decent offices for the hindrance of public business. A neat little thing, is it not?'

'Upon my word, I had no idea it would be like this. Why, it beats Trafalgar Square out and out!'

'Well, we rather think it does. We have taken a step or two in our national buildings since you went, uncle.'

'Then I hope you have improved the stuff you keep, or make there, in proportion.'

'Humph—that is quite another matter. Hulloo! turn up to your right! Here we are, uncle,' as they drove up to a small house in a narrow quiet street, of which a wall formed the greater part of one side. As the door opened, Nurse Moyle appeared in the background, curtsying and smiling, and crying her welcome; and a figure in deep mourning, standing on the stairs, was leaning on the balusters, as if longing, yet powerless to advance. Straight to that bending figure went Uncle Rupert, with his hat off, and his arms extended, and Anne was in a moment on his breast, clinging silently, and drawing her breath almost in sobs, but shedding no tears. He kept his arm round her as they ascended the stairs, and till he had placed her on a sofa by his side; then he gently raised her drooping head, and looked wistfully into her face.

It was one of those so evidently made for gladness, as to touch the heart painfully when marked by sorrow. The once laughing eyes were dimmed with want of sleep, and the lids heavy with weeping; her black hair had lost its gloss, and her active step its spring: her lips were parched with low fever, and her voice was husky and uncertain. A tender and a loving heart, thought Rupert Clavering, must hers indeed be, that grief for the old man should have crushed it like this!

He soothed her with caresses, with praises, with affectionate promises and expressions of regard, till she recovered voice and breath; and then came the rapid succession of question and answer, in which anxiety was to receive its first instalment of satisfaction; and Anne and Edward told him what he could hardly find courage to ask—of the quiet, painless end of his brother, and his burial in the tomb of the Claverings. It was not the time to go into other details;

he heard nothing of the struggle there had been to meet all the expenses; the difficulties of arranging anything in the absence of the heir; the sacrifices uncomplainingly made in order that all might be done as became a Clavering of Law-leigh; this would all come out later, when he was able to bear it. They only told him now what would make sorrow gentle, and soften the trial of this desolate return.

It was a desolate feeling for the worn and grey-haired man, that the link with his cherished past was broken, and he must knit new ties with the younger generation, who knew nothing of those by-gone days; but his courageous simplicity of heart never hesitated to take up a burden put before him, and he accepted his brother's loss as manfully as he had done many others in life. He was the first to change the conversation, deeply interesting as it was, lest the subject should be too much for the over-taxed spirits of his niece.

'How often have I wondered,' he said, after a pause, during which he had been looking silently at the two, now standing side by side, 'what you could be like. I have not a first-rate memory for faces, except for those I have grown up with, and I never could get beyond imagining a compound of Ellen and Charles; but I do not think I am so far beside the mark. You have something of both, each of you. Edward has his mother's profile, I knew that at once; and now I begin to remember the rest of his likeness, his father's eyes and mouth—eyes that never flinched from seeing the truth, and lips that never flinched from telling it. What says my niece Anne? Is the copy a fair transcript of the original?'

Anne had not once met her cousin's eye since his arrival, nor did she meet it now; but she laid her hand on his, and the pressure of her burning fingers thrilled through his frame.

'Uncle Rupert,' she said, 'if you wish to know what my cousin Edward is, you must not inquire when he is by, for you will not get at the truth; you must not judge by his face, for it will often mislead you; you must not take the opinion of the world in general, for the world in general knows very little about the matter. You must wait till a time comes when you are tired, and want rest—irritated, and want patience—desperate, and want comfort and hope, and it is to be had—Edward Wilton will give it, even at the cost of his own!'

Wilton laid his right hand on the fingers that still

pressed his left; but he said nothing, and did not even look up. Uncle Rupert's eyes glanced from the one to the other, radiant with joy and satisfaction.

'After such a character as that, my boy, you need send me no further. Now, I suppose, I must appeal to you in return for one of my niece Anne, though I doubt if you are not too highly bribed beforehand.'

'Yes, yes, Uncle Rupert,' said Anne; 'there is no dependence to be placed on the civil speeches he must make in my presence. Besides, I can tell you more in five words than he could do in fifty. Your niece Anne is spoiled, discontented, and ill-tempered, as you will not be long in finding out; and yet, with all that, she has not succeeded in tiring out the patience of her friends, himself included.'

'Is that all, Edward?' asked Uncle Rupert.

'Not quite, sir,' said he, looking up. 'I have nothing to say about the spoiling, or the discontent; they may or may not be true: but the temper, if hasty, is always generous. She may keenly resent a deception, bitterly feel an insult or a wrong—but they pass over her nature as the water over the rock, which it may wear away, but cannot defile.'

The feverish pressure on his hand increased while he was speaking, with force enough to give him real pain; he gave one glance at her face—she was smiling in return for Uncle Rupert's smile.

'You are both in a league, I see,' said the latter; 'there is no believing either of you, except on oath, and under private cross-examination. I tell you what, my dear children; I did not mean to talk of business to-night, but I must say one word to you both, just to put us all on a comfortable footing. I am not come back a rich man—that you know already—but I have enough for us three, and the enough may grow into abundance, and probably will. We leave that to the wisdom that can bless our honest endeavours if it be good for us. Meanwhile, as I said before, I have enough for all, and if I have a wish, a dream of happiness, it is built upon you two. Anything that will make you both happy, will make *me* so. Think of me in that light; I have worked and struggled for no other end. Confide in me whatever you think fit, and do not be afraid of my thwarting your wishes. I have not grown too old for sympathy with young ones; only old enough to be their safe friend. There,' shaking hands with both, 'that will do

about all that; now I will just go and shake the dust off my jacket—my room is below, isn't it?—and then I shall be ready to show Anne and her cook what an Australian appetite is like. Don't stir, Edward; Adam will do all I want.'

There was a short silence when he left the room, broken by Wilton, who observed with an unconscious sigh, 'It is a great comfort he is come, Anne, is it not?'

'Yes,' said she, languidly.

'Is he at all what you expected?'

'I don't know; yes, I think so. He is very kind.'

She turned to the table, and busied herself with some drooping flowers in a glass. The young man watched her silently, with a heavy heart, as she trimmed, and clipped, and re-arranged nervously, shunning his eye the while, until, as she was restoring the glass to its former place, a large rose in the centre fell to pieces over her hands. Then she looked at him, and shook her head, with a smile.

'It is of no use, Edward, is it? All the tenderness in the world will not freshen a dead flower.'

'No,' said he, kindly; 'but there are more where that came from.'

'Ay, Edward; but if root and stem are withered too, what shall freshen them?' She came round the table as she spoke, and sat down by his side. 'Is not that a poetical image after your own heart?'

'It is a simile, dear Anne, I should be sorry to see carried out in the case of any one I cared for. I have faith, great faith, in the reviving power of hope and affection.'

'Hope, affection—yes, they are strong while they last—but they too can die, Edward.'

'Not in an innocent heart—not in one who both deserves regard and wins it. Wronged, bitterly wronged it may be—robbed of much that is sweet, but not of its inner life, its power to rise again stronger than ever.'

'You think not?' she said, with the same dejected languor. 'I once thought so, too; but I have changed my opinion, lately, Edward, in that, as in some other things. Why don't you tell me where you have been to-day?'

'Did I not give you a promise, against my own judgment?'

'You executed my commission?' said she, hastily.

'Yes, to the letter. I watched him out of his club, followed him to her residence, allowed him time enough to

go in, and then left your parcel as you desired. What became of it I cannot say, for I went off to meet Uncle Rupert.'

'You saw him, then?'

'As plainly as I see you. I was close to him once; so close, Anne, that it required some self-control, I can tell you, to keep my hand from his vile throat.'

'Edward, if I hear such a word again—'

'You shall not; I beg your pardon—it slipped out un-awares. You want to know how he was looking, I dare say. Very handsome, as usual, and rather sulky. He certainly does not flaunt his happiness before the world, if that is any comfort to us.'

'Happiness? Do you ever imagine for a moment that he is, that he will be, happy? Is a man likely to be happy who loves one woman, and marries another? I tell you, Edward, it is so: and the whole universe may say otherwise—I *know* it; as certainly as we sit together here, does Frederick Atterbury love me still, better than any other being on earth!'

'Except—'

'No, I do not except her; I except no one.'

'I was not thinking of her, but of *himself*.'

'That is not love, Edward.'

'Then it is detestable selfishness, which is worse.'

'That is not for *you* to say: I won't bear it.'

'You won't bear anything *I* say, Anne; but you do not seem to consider how I am to stand what *you* do.'

'Poor Edward! I believe I am very cross sometimes. I will try and be more amiable. I ought to be, considering how good you are to take all this trouble.'

'Very good sounds very cold, dear Anne.'

'Does it? How am I to please you, then?'

'By taking it for granted, once for all, that whatever concerns you, concerns me as a matter of course; and, therefore, you need never trouble yourself to apologize, or think it necessary to thank me. That is all I ask.'

She did thank him, nevertheless, by a gentle pressure of his hand; and both were silent for a little while.

'What are you thinking of, Anne?' he asked, presently.

'I was wondering whether Miss Ormonde had opened her parcel yet.'

'The servant promised she should have it at once, so most

probably she has. Do you know, it rather went against my conscience when it came to the point.'

'You said you had seen her?'

'Yes, several times, in the Park.'

'And she really is as handsome as they say?'

'Tastes may differ as to that; but she is fair, and elegant, with a remarkably sweet countenance—worthy, I am sure, of a happier fate.'

The dimmed eyes of Anne Clavering lighted up with a fierce and sudden fire.

'Edward,' she said, in a hoarse voice, 'if he breaks her heart, and withers her beauty, and turns her fair hair white before its time, do you think I shall pity her?'

He made no answer, and she went on, after a short pause, in a lower tone, that sent a chill through his veins as he listened.

'You gave me a high character to Uncle Rupert just now, and I did not contradict you. I knew he would find out what I am in time. You felt compunction, you say, in leaving that present, which may have caused pain already, or may cause it hereafter. What will you think of me, then, when I tell you it was with that very intention I gave it up—robbing myself of my last treasure, that I might win one moment of revenge?'

'I can only think indulgently of anything you do, or say, or feel under this trial: your nobler self will return when it is over.'

'Never—never. I can never be again what I was. I can never forget that I have felt as I do now—felt what I know to be wicked, unchristian, unholy—enough to bring down a curse upon me, if it were not punishment enough already in itself. You do not understand it—how should you? Did you ever, in your life, know what it was to hate—to thirst for the sorrow and humiliation of another—to long to look upon her in trouble and disgrace—to see her pointed at in scorn, and mock her in her misery? Such a state of mind would make a hell of heaven—and it is mine towards Eleanor Ormonde!'

His pitying eyes rested on her convulsed and working face, like moonlight on the foaming waters. To argue against the madness of her grief at that moment would have been useless: he knew her real nature better than she knew it herself.

'What had I ever done to her,' she went on, after another

pause, during which she had been walking up and down the small apartment with quick, restless steps—‘what had I ever done to her that she should rob me of my all? She has everything the world can give her; she is rich, fashionable, and beautiful; she might choose among hundreds, and be happy; why must she take from me, who am poor and insignificant, and helpless, the one thing that could have made my life worth having? I never did her any injury; I would not deprive her of anything she has; but for what she has done, and is doing, I hate her—yes, Edward, look at me as you may, hate her so intensely, that if I thought a day would ever come—Oh, God forgive me! how wicked I am!’

She threw herself on the sofa, and hid her face in her arms, as if ashamed that any eye should look on her despair. The young man started up, and stood bending over her, with a face in which passion, for the first time, began to contend with sympathy.

‘Anne, my own dear Anne!—dearer than I can ever express, even to myself—in mercy to me try and bear up, or flesh and blood will not hold out: it is as much as they can do already!’

The tone of his voice roused her more than his words; she lifted her head with a sudden thrill of fear.

‘Edward, if you dare!’

‘Do not talk about daring; I have stood a great deal, enough to make me doubt my own identity; but to see you like this, and *he*, the cause, within my reach and do nothing—’

‘What is there for you to do? Who gave you leave to make this your quarrel? Do you think I would ever speak to you again if you lifted your hand against him?’

‘I dare say not,’ said he, dejectedly.

‘Then why do you try and make me more miserable than I am, when you know you are the only friend I have to whom I *can* give vent, before whom I *may* give way?’

‘Come,’ said Wilton, ‘there is some comfort in hearing that. It is the most encouraging thing you have said for a long time.’

She could not help smiling. ‘Poor fellow! it is very hard to make your life wretched, and scold you into the bargain. Some day it will be your turn, and then you will come to me, if I live to listen to you. But how selfish and inconsiderate I have been all this time! Call nurse, and let us get ready for Uncle Rupert. He will be back upon us before we know

where we are, and I would not have him see me like this for the world.'

The room looked bright and cheerful when Rupert Clavering again appeared in it; a plain but excellent meal was on the table, which Nurse Moyle had prepared herself, not trusting even the cutting of the bread to the tender mercies of the little maid-of-all-work, who supplied the "attendance" stipulated for with the lodgings. Neither would she let Adam wait upon the party; but kept him in a humiliated condition outside the door, to receive plates and bring dishes at her bidding, while she, in a snowy cap and apron, performed the butler's part.

Uncle Rupert's chair faced the window, whence he had a view over the wall before mentioned, into a garden, if garden it could be called, composed of gravel walks and turf, and a border of trees. Beyond this, his eyes could rest with delight on the grey low towers and lofty nave of the Abbey, well remembered, though unseen so long. The delight, indeed, was so great, he felt obliged to make some excuse. You learned to appreciate those old things, he observed, when you had to make new ones for yourselves. The new Houses were all very well, and very handsome, but they could do that sort of thing in Sydney, or anywhere, with money and space. It would take them a few centuries to build up a past like that. 'We are but parvenus, after all,' added Uncle Rupert.

'Do not say "we," uncle,' interposed Anne. 'You have nothing more to do with them; you have been away too long already. We can never spare you now.'

'Well, well, my dear, depend upon it, I will stay with you if I can, and if you make me comfortable; a great deal depends on that! I am not quite sure yet whether nurse will like to undertake the charge of an old bush farmer. I don't believe she knew me to-day, let her say what she pleases.'

'As to that, Mr Rupert, directly you open your mouth, I defy a baby in arms not to know you, leastways if it had seen you before; which it would be strange indeed if I didn't, who remember you and my poor dear master, as young-looking as Mr Ed'ard, and a deal more saucy—yes, indeed, sir. But, Mr Rupert, it would be a blind day with me, old as I am, when I didn't know the very shadow of a Clavering; I have seen none like 'em in Lunnon yet, for all it is so big; and I'll be bound you didn't meet none among them pickpockets and blackamoors you've been living among, begging your pardon,



Mr Rupert, sir, and hoping you'll stay at home now, sir, which I wish you had done long before.'

'I wish I had, nurse,' said he, mournfully; 'but I acted for the best. Twice I thought I should be able to come home, and twice was I thrown back by roguery. Never mind; here I am at last, and by-and-by we shall all be together at Lawleigh—as soon as ever I can get my affairs settled. These lodgings will do for us, I suppose, for the present? That view is worth anything.'

'Well, sir, indeed, they isn't such rooms as I should wish to put you in; but Mr Ed'ard, he chose them, and he did his best, sir, I make no manner of doubt, and I make him an allowance of course. And the house is kept by a decent, respectable, helpless sort of a body, who can't get a servant-girl to stay with her. They are all such impudent, dirty, know-nothing little stuck-ups as I never see. Can't sweep a floor, or dust a chair, or boil a potato fit for a Christian, but dizen themselves out in smart imitation things they can't pay for, and if you send 'em for an errand, stay for an hour, chattering rubbish with every idle hussy like themselves that they meet. I haven't no patience with their mothers, that I haven't, or with their teachers either, for the matter of that, if they ever had any, which perhaps they didn't; so we must make 'em an allowance, as I said before, Mr Rupert,' concluded Nurse Moyle, in a tone more inclining to lenity.

'Stop, stop,' remonstrated Wilton; 'you promised the allowance to *me*, and I cannot afford to share it with Mrs Brown, or Sally either, since I get no praise. I can tell you, nurse, I expected some; such cheerful lodgings as these are not to be picked up in a minute.'

'Very well, sir; if you think so, enjoy your own opinion; I dare say I am wrong, and that it is very cheerful to have to pay for the cream off your own milk in a separate jug, and find water in both, and to give as much for a cabbage or an onion as a basketful is worth; and mighty lively, too, no doubt, to have a saucy brat of a girl always under your feet, that will mind nothing you tell her, and give you sauce into the bargain—very much so indeed! But, if you was in my place, Mr Ed'ard, with the credit of the family in Lunnon all depending on your own pair of hands, I'm thinking you'd sing a very different song.'

'That he would, nurse,' said Mr Rupert Clavering; 'and it's well for us we don't depend on him. And for the rest, it

would be a blind day for the Claverings, few as there are left, if they ever overlooked the affection and kindness of an old friend like yourself. I know what our obligations to you are, my dear woman, and one of the duties I am come to fulfil for those who are gone, will be to show our sense of them.'

'God bless ye, Mr Rupert, don't ye now!' she whimpered, as he wrung her hand; 'it's just like you to be so kind, and my dear master knew you would. And, if you please, sir, I have a duty to perform that I promised should be done the first day I see you—only I thought you should eat your dinner first.'

The young people looked at each other and at her in some surprise, not unmixed with anxiety, as she took out of her pocket (among an extraordinary collection of miscellaneous articles) a parcel, carefully sealed up in several wrappers in paper, from which she extracted a letter, and handed it to Mr Clavering. Wilton, as it passed him, recognized his Uncle Henry's hand. 'Was that meant to be a secret, nurse?' he asked, hastily.

'Indeed, Mr Ed'ard, I don't know.'

'Then, why didn't you tell me you had it?'

'Just because I didn't know, sir. My duty was to give it to Mr Rupert, as I said I would, and he can do as he pleases.'

'You ought to have known better,' muttered Wilton, as he rose, and leaned upon the back of Anne's chair, while she, with eyes dilating wildly, sat watching her uncle's movements. Uncle Rupert, meanwhile, was holding the letter unopened, and trying to see through glasses that would grow dim.

'Dear Harry—dear old fellow—how his hand must have shaken. I can hardly make out a word.' He turned away to the window, rubbed his glasses vigorously, and began to read. Not a word was spoken; Nurse Moyle, her cloth, and her tray, had all withdrawn, and neither of the cousins moved so much as a finger, though it seemed as if he never would look round.

When, at last, he did, the agitation in his face was even greater than their own. He could not speak at first; his lips, his whole frame, were trembling as much as those of his unhappy niece.

'He tells me,' he began, after one or two vain efforts, 'that there is something in which he has been too remiss and

careless, and leaves (asking me, God bless him! to forgive him) for me to do. And the first thing—Anne, my child, come here!’

Anne rose, she hardly knew how; and though her eyes were downcast, put her hand unhesitatingly in his.

‘He says you will tell me everything; he conjures me to see that you are made happy. Need I make you a solemn promise? I am ready to do it—only be open and honest with me, stranger as I have been obliged to be, and I promise you I will try—yes, even if it should be what I do not quite like at first—I promise,—Oh, my girl! my girl! what is all this?’

She had flung her arms around his neck, and her choking tears were pouring forth in torrents. ‘Oh, Uncle Rupert! oh, Uncle Rupert! can you do anything—before it is too late?’

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## CHAPTER IV

### THE WEDDING PRESENT.

IN a handsome drawing-room in—— Place, well known and much frequented by the members of an extensive and lively society, a select party of friends had that day assembled, first, to partake of one of the excellent luncheons for which Sir John Pierpoint’s house was noted; and, secondly, to examine and criticize the goodly display of wedding presents that had been made to his ward, Miss Ormonde. Conversation, which had been gay and animated for some time, was beginning to flag; gentlemen were secretly looking at their watches, and murmuring to each other about engagements elsewhere; but as yet no one ventured to be the first to depart. There was evidently something or somebody still to be waited for, though a whisper began to circulate that they might have to wait some time.

‘Queer proceeding this,’ observed one gentleman to his neighbour, as they stood together at the window, where their remarks could be safely made. ‘It is to be hoped we shall not be served like this to-morrow.’

‘What can have become of him?’ returned the other, by many years the younger of the two. ‘There was nothing in the morning papers—funds, and stocks, and that sort of thing—to keep him all day, was there? I’d send all my clerks and fellows to the right-about, I know, in his place, sooner than fail in an appointment *here*.’

‘I’ll be bound you would, or even sooner than not have a pair of boots to your liking. A first-rate man of business you would make, certainly. I will bank with you when you begin, for a consideration. I make it a principle to encourage deserving young men.’

‘Upon my life, I am not so sure you would encourage me long: I could never stand shovelling sovereigns about without putting some in my pocket.’

‘That is your idea of a banker’s work, and a banker’s temptation, is it? Well, you are not so far wrong. Ask Fred Atterbury, when he comes.’

‘Ah, when! Do you know, Despard, it is not like him to fail his bride elect the day before his wedding, and I know Sir John is uncomfortable about it.’

‘Sir John—ah, indeed!’ said Mr Despard, looking across the room at a portly, elderly gentleman, with a good-natured, but rather anxious expression of face, who was talking to one of the ladies. ‘Sir John is uncomfortable, is he? Poor Sir John—he is often uncomfortable.’

‘I have never seen him so before, then.’

‘Fortunate youth. Well, I have. By the way, did he buy that trotting pony of yours?’

‘Yes, at my own price—and that was a good long one.’

‘Of course; and paid for it?’

‘No, not yet.’

‘Ah! well, confess the truth, Compton—he has lent you a ten-pound note before now?’

‘Nonsense; what should I borrow of him for? I have lent him one more than once, on the contrary.’

‘And have been punctually repaid?’

‘Why, I can’t say that—but of course I shall.’

‘My dear boy, I beg your pardon, but you have a great deal to learn before you set out for a man of business. You have been overpaid already.’

‘No, I declare I have not! I have never had a sixpence.’

‘You are here, Compton; that is your money. We all paid our footing to share the privilege. We all raffled for

the great prize, only Fred had most luck, or most tickets, and he has drawn it.'

'Much he seems to care for it,' returned young Compton, glancing enviously at the distant group of ladies. 'A prize! I should think she was: he gets all the prizes. I would give any money for that terrier of his—he rides the best horses in London; and now with such a charming pretty girl, always good-tempered, and with no end of money—he ought to be the happiest fellow in the world!'

'Very true,' said Mr Despard, placidly, 'and no doubt he is, or will be to-morrow—if he is not too busy. I say, Sir John,' as their host, with an attempt at easy gaiety which sat on his troubled features but ill, strolled up to the window, 'if Fred is missing to-morrow in this way, I mean to offer myself as a substitute—warranted to be punctual, and safe never to be detained by having too much to do!'

'Thank you, Jack: it is well to be provided in case of need,' said Sir John Pierpoint. He gave one anxious look from the window before asking, 'Did you see Atterbury to-day, by chance?'

'No. I called, but he was out.'

'How have you thought him lately? We fancied he was not well.'

'I fancied the same, if it is a fancy. He is overworked, I suppose. He has hardly a word for a dog, as the saying is. His people make the same complaint. I hope Miss Ormonde fares better.'

'Well, to say the truth,' said Sir John, drawing him aside, and speaking low, 'he has not been in spirits, even with her; and we have not seen him as often as we could wish. She has, you know, a remarkably sweet temper, and knows how to deal with his; or else, really, I do not know what would have come of it, for I have seen him very provoking. To-day, now, we have been expecting him ever since breakfast. Everybody is remarking his absence.'

'Everybody, that is, who does not consider how much he has to do,' said Despard, coolly. 'The head of a bank like that cannot leave business, I suppose, for a month or so, without finding plenty to arrange before starting. As Tommy Compton says, Fred draws all the prizes; and you can't do that by keeping your hands in your pockets.'

'None can accuse him of *that*,' said Sir John. 'Hé is a liberal fellow enough—quite the gentleman in money matters

—and that reminds me—do you think——?’ An anxious whisper followed. Despard listened gravely, and seemed to ponder. ‘I’ll see what I can do,’ he said presently; ‘it will depend on the mood we find him in. Being in the wrong, he will probably be remarkably unamiable when he comes, if he comes at all, which seems to be doubtful. I am inclined to a small bet on the subject.’

‘Name your terms,’ said Compton, turning his head quickly from the window.

‘Oh! then he is come, is he? Much obliged, Master Tommy. Yes, there he is, on that hot chestnut of his, that he bought of Lord Rayland. Upon my word, they are a fine couple, man and horse, and I envy nobody the managing of either.’

The entrance of Frederick Atterbury at once revived the flagging spirits of the assembly. A volley of pleasantries and questions greeted him, of course, but he received them with good humour; apologizing to the ladies in general, with fewer words than they quite approved, but with the ease of one who felt a few from him were worth a hundred from another; spoke a sentence or two to Sir John, too technical and business-like to be universally interesting, and then quietly made his way to Miss Ormonde.

‘You had not given me up, had you?’ he asked, as he took a seat by her side.

‘It would take a great many offences to make me do that,’ was the reply, in a voice whose sweetness went further to clear his brow than all the sallies of the whole room. He took but little part in the conversation that arose around them, but sat with elbow on his knee, and his head on his hand, as if resting his tired eyes and spirits by tranquil contemplation of her face.

It would have been difficult for any eye to look without pleasure into a face like hers. She was just five-and-twenty, an age when if romance is not yet quiescent, good sense is in command, and when what is to make the life valuable is generally begun. She was slender, tall, and very fair; her eyes were grey, soft, and earnest; her mouth, like the voice that spoke by it, peculiarly sweet; her hair a delicate brown. As the heiress of a considerable fortune, she was sure to be admired had she possessed fewer attractions; but it would have been difficult not to love the gentle, winning expression of Eleanor Ormonde’s countenance, if she had been your

poor relation, come to stay with you for an indefinite time. With every facility for being inconsiderate and egotistical, she had the happiness of being as little of either as a woman could well be in such circumstances; and the kindness of her heart spoke in every line of her features, in every inflexion of her voice.

And the face so earnestly turned towards her, with its deep shadows and careworn lines, and weary look of anxiety and unrest—was it indeed the same as that whose joyous light had played like sunshine through the oak-panelled hall at Lawleigh—the face whose brightness haunted Anne Clavering's pillow, making hateful the return of day? Ah! could those loving eyes that studied every line and furrow with such tender sympathy, as honourable wounds she longed to heal, have known what they could have told her—would she have loved him still? He had asked himself the question many times; perhaps he was asking it then.

His reverie, for such it had gradually become, was broken by the approach of the butler, who, threading his way through the ladies, handed to Miss Ormonde a salver, on which lay a small white parcel of unmistakeable shape. So many parcels of this, and of every possible size and form, had Sir John's servants conveyed to the young lady already, that it required all the composure of a London butler to prevent his showing he knew what it meant as well as she did, and was to the full as curious as any of the company. Miss Ormonde, though pretty well inured to these surprises, appeared rather curious herself; for the handwriting of the address, clear, bold, and full of character, was unfamiliar; and yet she could think of no one from whom it was likely to have come, unless from her lover.

'Was this the secret of your delay?' she asked, smiling; 'for if so, you were forgiven too soon.'

He coloured slightly, with a half-conscious glance at Mr Despard, who had drawn near the group, and was observing them attentively.

'You will have so many real faults to pardon,' he replied, 'I would advise you not to trouble yourself with imaginary ones.'

'Then why are you and Mr Despard exchanging such mysterious signs and nods? Do you suppose I cannot read them? I give due notice that your secret is guessed, so now let us see.'

She broke the seals, and held the envelope to the light. 'I can make nothing out of the handwriting, except that it is very pretty. Perhaps you may know it better, Frederick?'

Know it? Did he not, as well as he knew his own? He turned so white, that Despard came up behind him, and put his hand on his shoulder.

'What is it, Fred?' he whispered.

There was no answer; Atterbury's eyes were fixed on the packet, following the light fingers of his mistress, as they removed one wrapper after another, till, from a case of maroon leather, she lifted a plain gold bracelet with a curious massive clasp.

'Now, sir,' she said, turning to him again, 'do you own to this or not?'

His ghastly face, as he involuntarily recoiled, startled her so much, that the bracelet dropped heavily on the floor; but Atterbury, instead of picking it up, rose hastily to his feet, and forcing his way through the ladies, almost staggered to the door. Several voices asking if he felt ill, he hurriedly assented. Could he have a glass of wine?

'Yes, yes,' said Despard, seizing his arm; 'the luncheon is still in the dining-room; come with me. It is nothing but the heat, he will be all right presently.' And he dragged his friend away, leaving general consternation behind them.

A servant was just beginning to clear the table, but on their entrance would have withdrawn. Atterbury called him back. 'Is my boy down-stairs?'

'Yes, sir; he has been here some time.'

'Send him up, will you? By the way, who left that parcel for Miss Ormonde, do you know?'

'A gentleman, sir; he did not leave his name, only desired it should be given to Miss Ormonde directly, sir.'

'Ah! send up the boy at once, if you please.'

He turned to the sideboard as the man left the room, and, rejecting his friend's offered sherry, seized a decanter of brandy, and drank off nearly half a tumblerful. Despard watched him with some uneasiness.

'I tell you what, Fred, if you get up the steam in that style, it will be no joke sitting on the boiler.'

'I must do this, or sink: perhaps that would be the best,' said Atterbury. 'It will end in that, sooner or later. Come



in, Joe!’ as a diminutive figure in a tight groom’s livery appeared at the door, ‘come in, and shut the door after you. Did you see the gentleman who brought a parcel here just now?’

‘Oh yes, sir.’

‘Were you near enough to observe him closely?’

‘Oh yes, sir, I was just at the door, asking if you had left any orders for me, sir, and I see a young gentleman give in the parcel, and he said it was to be took to Miss Ormonde directly.’

‘Should you know him again, Joe?’

‘I *did* know him, sir; I’ve seen him after us once or twice before now.’

‘I declare I thought so too,’ observed Despard. ‘I was watching your arrival, Fred, and noticed a fellow with fair hair, whom I had seen before, and could not recollect till this minute where.’

‘Did you see which way he went?’ asked Atterbury.

‘Oh yes, sir.’

‘You did? Then you must go after him.’

The boy, a quick-witted little fellow, with a fresh Devonshire complexion, and eyes brimming with mischief, pricked up his ears at this announcement, as a dog does when his master takes up a stone.

‘Here,’ said Atterbury, putting a sovereign in his hand, ‘mind now what I tell you. Follow him as fast as you can—take a Hansom if you like, only do not let yourself be observed—see where he goes, and into what house, and find out who lives there. No chattering, mind—and no stupidity. You understand? There, be off with you.’

The boy was gone in a moment. It was not the first strange errand he had been sent on, and he liked nothing better.

‘A knowing infant that,’ said Mr Despard. ‘Where did you pick him up?’

‘He is a *protégé* of Eleanor’s—an orphan from her aunt’s school—she persuaded me to take him, and he is sharp enough.’

‘He had need be, if this is the kind of work you give him. Poor innocent Miss Ormonde! her best Sunday scholar, no doubt—and she thinks she has provided for his being so well looked after. But how about this affair? Is it a rival?’

'I shouldn't wonder,' was the languid reply, as Atterbury lounged back in an arm-chair.

'You seem disposed to be cool about it, I must say.'

'Cool, am I? Feel my hand.'

'Well, my dear fellow, there is a little cognac there, certainly. Try and eat a mouthful; come—think of *la chère reine* in the next room.'

'Don't mention her, Despard, if you would not drive me mad. Would to Heaven I had never seen her.'

'Wheugh! not quite so loud, old fellow—it might be awkward.'

'Jack, it was all your doing. You persuaded me—you set my poor father on—between you, you made a fool and a villain of me: I cannot forgive *him* in his grave—what must I feel to *you*?'

'Take it coolly, Fred; I can allow for a little excitement, but there is no use in wasting stuff. Are we going to quarrel?'

'Something very like it, sir.'

'All in good time, then, if it must be so; only let us understand each other. No—upon my life you shall not kill yourself with any more brandy! Have some bitter ale—it will do you more good.'

Atterbury put the tumbler to his lips, but set it down untasted, and laid his head on the table. Despard stood over him, with his hand on his shoulder.

'You say it was my doing, Fred, do you? Be just, if you cannot be complimentary. Was it my doing that you were brought up as you were—an idle, pleasant, good-looking dog, with nothing on earth to do but spend money while you had it, and when you hadn't, to get into debt? Come now.'

'True enough,' said Atterbury, dejectedly.

'Was it my doing that when you were head and ears in this agreeable state of liabilities, you fell in love with a girl without a sixpence?'

'Despard, if you dare breathe a syllable about *her*—'

'Not a word, my dear fellow, if you dislike it: I am only on my defence. Was it I who convinced you it was out of the question, or was it your father?'

Atterbury groaned in bitterness of spirit: it was his only answer.

'Well, and then when you *were* convinced, and told me yourself your only hope was, that she would forget you,

then indeed I did introduce you to my friend Sir John; and your father, like a sensible man, saw the advantage this match would be, and so did you. It was treating you much better than you deserved. You were in a scrape that your father would not get you out of on any other terms, and if the heiress had been humpbacked, crabbed, and ugly, you would have been glad to put up with it: instead of which, you have drawn the prize of the season—an amiable, pretty, and good-hearted girl, whom you can turn round your finger, and who believes you to be the best, as well as the handsomest fellow in the world. Is not this true?’

‘I cannot deny it, Jack; I wish I could. I wish I were dead. If I were not a coward as well as rascal, I should have died before now.’

‘Pooh, pooh! this is only nervousness; it will all pass off by to-morrow. You are not the first bridegroom whose heart has failed him from excess of happiness.’

‘Don’t sneer,’ said Atterbury, fiercely; ‘it is bad enough to be turned sick with your reasonings, but if you begin to insult me—’

‘The chances are, your courage may return at my expense; I cannot afford that, Fred: to-morrow concerns more honest folks besides yourself. I work hard for my wages, and it would be a shame if I were cheated out of them at last. Did you call at Hancock’s for the locket I chose for you? No, I knew you wouldn’t. Well, I did, and here it is. It will make your peace with the lady, and I must say, your courtship wants a little gilding. I never saw a wooer so sparing of his attentions and sweet words. It is well they know you are so rich, is it not?’

‘Will you hold your tongue, and not drive me mad? I tell you, Jack,’ lowering his voice, ‘it has very nearly come to this, that I must tell her everything before it is too late. It is too base, too mean. There was a rumour to-day about that Hamburgh house that made my blood run cold. ‘What would become of us if that went just now?’

‘Why, it would be ticklish work, I dare say; but we have heard these *canards* before, and survived them. Did you see old Martock?’

‘Yes, and that was the worst of it; he thought it looked ugly.’

‘He always does; it is his *métier* to look after ugly things. He has a pocketful that I know of, that will be

very pretty dishes to set before *la chère reine* while you are about it. I hope you will call me in as a witness of your shrift.'

Atterbury sighed heavily, and strode up and down the room.

'Too late, too late!' he muttered, more to himself than his companion; 'all the confessions I could make would not rub out the past wrong, or bring back the past hope. I cannot give her back what I have taken from her. I rob every one who loves or trusts me, and can make no restitution—none! Whatever comes into my hands passes into that gulf of ruin where I must sink at last—soul and body, honour and substance. By Heavens, Jack, I must have some more to drink. Well, sherry if you will, it does not much matter.'

He poured out nearly a tumbler of wine, and was draining it, when Sir John cautiously opened the door.

'Ah, Atterbury, my dear fellow, that is right; I thought you only wanted your luncheon; I told Eleanor so, but girls are easily frightened. She is really unhappy about you, and, to tell you the truth, cannot help fancying you are angry with her. The young people are all going, and I thought you would like just to show yourself before the party breaks up—'

'Yes,' said Déspard, gently pushing his friend to the door, 'you may go in now, poor fellow. It was all I could do, Sir John, to prevent his going in sooner; but he was so unwell, I forced him to sit quiet a minute. Hulloo, Fred! what is this you have left behind you? It looks uncommonly like a *cadeau de noce*; may we not have a sight of it before the ladies?'

'Don't be a fool; give it to me!' said Atterbury, taking it roughly from his hand; and passing Sir John without ceremony, he walked quickly out of the room. Sir John stood looking after him, stroking his chin dubiously.

'He is in a strange mood to-day, Despard; I cannot make him out. He has been very odd lately, in many ways, and really at times I have not known what to think.'

'Love and money, my dear Pierpoint, are enough to account for anything.'

'I suppose so; but I don't know. There can be no more doubt, of course, of his being really attached, than of his being rich?'

'Of course,' echoed Despard, gravely.

'Then what do you suppose upset him just now? Had that present anything to do with it?'

'Well, in strictest confidence, I think he is a little jealous; and he fancied, and fancies still, it came from some admirer of Miss Ormonde's. This only shows how much he loves her.'

'Perhaps so, but it is horridly unpleasant, and has given those good people enough to talk about for the next week. I say, Despard, did you say a word about my little affair?'

'No; he was not in a mood for that sort of fun. We must try him by-and-by, when he has recovered his spirits. Make Miss Ormonde bring him round, and then we will see. She is not offended with him, I hope.'

Oh, I hope not. She is very fond of him, and very good-tempered, as you know. She is always ready to forgive.'

'That is lucky, for she will have enough of it before she has done. But as it is as well to be on the safe side, you had better go and keep an eye on them—I have an appointment, and must run away—but remember, he may try her too far, and too soon.'

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## CHAPTER V

### THE EVE OF THE WEDDING.

THE misgivings with which Miss Ormonde's guardian returned to the drawing-room seemed to have been all thrown away. No one would have imagined for a moment that a cloud could have ever arisen to shade the happiness of her betrothed, who saw him, as Sir John did, the centre of a group of admiring ladies, parrying their attacks, charming them by his gay sallies, promising them all they could demand, and defying all they could prognosticate. His face might be a little flushed, and his manner almost too eager, but the excitement of his situation accounted for that; and no one could be hypercritical on a lover who could make himself so agreeable, and atone for his unpunctuality by such lovely diamonds. The two Miss Pierpoints were among the most vehement of his fair assailants, laying down a complete campaign of fes-

tivities for the ensuing winter, which they wanted him to promise should be carried out.

'And what is to become of business, Miss Pierpoint,' he said, laughing, 'if steady, practical men like myself are to set up for leaders of fashion, getting only quizzed for our pains? How am I to work all day, if I dance, and act charades, and listen to concerts, and hand ladies down to supper all night?'

'Only hear him! Only hear the over-worked operative! Will no one bring in a Two-Hours Bill to save his fine energies from wearing out, and give him time to improve his mind? Come, Mr Atterbury, we will be merciful; every time you give us tickets for the opera shall count in your favour, and we will allow you to spend a quiet evening at home; and *very* quiet it will be!'

'Meaning—?' said he, interrogatively.

'Meaning whatever your conscience tells you. You have a great talent for silence sometimes.'

'I am glad to hear it; it is a man's privilege, Miss Pierpoint.'

'And, like many other privileges, very much abused, Mr Atterbury. I have no notion of men monopolizing all the peace and quietness. Conversation is a part of social labour, and it is a mark of low civilization, you know, when the hardest work is left to the women.'

'Very true; but you see, Miss Pierpoint, there are some kinds of delicate fancy-work, for which women are so much better adapted than men: all that nice handling of character, that minute analysis of motives, that skilful transposition of facts which make ladies' society so instructive, are as peculiarly theirs as watch-making or satin-stich. Not but what they may be over-worked. I will advocate a Two-Hours Small-Talk Bill with all my heart.'

'Small talk! and that is all you can say for our piquant remarks and flow of anecdote and conversation? Really, Mr Atterbury, I begin to have strong doubts of you—very strong doubts indeed. You are as heretical in your views as unpunctual in your appointments. In the beaten way of friendship, now, though you scarcely deserve its continuance, what made you so late to-day?'

'That question has been answered once already, Clara,' interposed Miss Ormonde, who had been listening with a quiet expression of amusement.

‘And are you so innocent, my dear Eleanor, as to believe all that fine story about pressure of business, and delay at the jeweller’s, that sounds so very plausible, and so very unlike the fact! Just as if anybody could detain him if he did not choose to be detained; and as if Hancock did not know better than to keep his best customer waiting on an occasion like this!’

Eleanor’s fair cheek reddened, as she replied with some spirit, that, strange as it might appear, she had been always accustomed to believe what her friends told her until she found them to be untrue. Sir John patted her approvingly on the shoulder; and Atterbury, without meeting her eyes, thanked her by a bow; while Miss Pierpoint, seeing she had gone too near the mark to be quite pleasant, hastened to turn it all off.

‘Nobody ever yet persuaded Hero to doubt Claudio, and all Beatrice got by her superior wisdom was to be tricked into the scrape herself; so, for fear of such a destiny, I suggest that Mr Atterbury clears himself of contempt by submitting to the sentence of the court without demur, and that we carry him off in the carriage to Madame Alençon’s. She has never sent home those lovely handkerchiefs that were to be embroidered for you, Eleanor, and it is the first time I ever knew her fail. Unpunctuality is becoming so fashionable’ (this last speech was to Frederick aside), ‘that I would almost bet a pair of gloves that we shall have to wait at the church to-morrow. Where are we to look for you in such a case?’

‘In the churchyard, of course,’ said he, in the same tone, yet with something in his smile which made her rather glad than otherwise that the breaking up of the party ended the conversation. Really, if he had not been so rich, she did not think she should have envied Eleanor so much after all.

It was agreed that Atterbury should accompany the ladies, and Miss Ormonde, having discreetly made good speed in her toilette, found him, as she intended, alone when she came down. She had not expected, however, to find him sitting in his moodiest attitude; still less, to be accosted with the stern question, ‘Why do you leave that lying about?’ as he pointed to her mysterious present, which had been left on the table. It required a temper like hers to make the gentle reply, which she did with perfect truth, that she had quite forgotten it. His own gift had put the other out of her head.

'Frederick,' she said, after an interval of gloomy silence on his part, during which she had observed him attentively, 'you are not satisfied about this bracelet, and not exactly pleased with me. Will you not hear me in my own defence?'

'You, Eleanor?'

'Yes. If you are not pleased, there must be a cause, and it is my duty to clear myself. Do you believe my word?'

'Sooner than another's oath. If I could not trust you, Eleanor, I should be poor indeed!'

'Then listen. I know nothing of this foolish mystery, nor of any one who can have either the right or the inclination to take any part in it. Is that sufficient for you?'

'More than sufficient to humble me in the dust for behaving to you as I do. Can you forgive me?'

'Forgive you—for what? If you doubted me, certainly, on one condition: that you take this unfortunate present of mine into your own keeping, till we find out who sent it.'

He gave her one of those sad dark looks, whose meaning all her penetration could not fathom.

'No, Eleanor, you are too generous to make conditions: you must pardon freely, if at all. Keep that bracelet, keep it carefully. I ask it as a favour, a proof of your love. Keep it till, as you say, we find out the sender. Then, if you choose, you may give it back. It will not matter much, one way or another, by that time. Eleanor, was it true what you said just now, that you believed every one till you found them false?'

'It was true,' she said, gently.

'And when you do find them false, what then?'

'I hardly know, love: I have never been tried. I hope I never shall.'

'Dare you hope that in a world like this? Would it be a terrible blow to find I was a poor man?'

She smiled gravely. 'It would, now that I realize more what that would imply; but I was foolish enough once to wish that you had nothing.'

'You wished it? Why?'

'That I might give you everything.'

Again he looked at her steadfastly, and this time with a mournful compassion that haunted her long afterwards.

'Eleanor, you are too good for me, and come what may, I trust you. It seems a small compliment, just now, does it not? But some day you will appreciate its full meaning. I



trust you as a friend on whom I could fall back in my worst extremity ; and trust you all the more that you have not the least idea what it is that you are about to undertake !’

‘ You think so ? ’ she returned, bending over him with a sweetness even his gloom could not resist. ‘ You really think I am going blindly to work, engaging for I know not what, with I know not whom ? You may well say it is a slight compliment to trust me ! Come, I will tell you what I have discovered by careful observation. You are not perfect, by any means ; you have your faults, like other men ; and one is, that you give your mind too much to your profession ; you cannot, or will not, shake off its cares when it is necessary for your rest. Now, I know nothing of business, as you and your lawyer, Mr Martock, have told me often enough ; but I am quite sure it must be better done when mind and body are kept in a healthy state by recreation ; and therefore,’ her blush grew rosy as she spoke, ‘ it will be my part to do this—to make home your refuge from money-making, your holiday-ground, where you may renew your strength for your daily work—work in which your wife will sympathize all the more for helping you sometimes to forget it !’

‘ Oh, if you could but teach me to forget it altogether, Eleanor—to forget I had ever lived or felt at all before I followed you ! If to-morrow could but be the opening of a new life, in which the past was as if it had never been !’

‘ Why should it ? You are not the first who has felt, as perhaps you do, that some of your best years have been wasted. Dearest, I am not reproaching you for thoughtlessness and high spirits, as if they were crimes. No, do not hide your face, or I shall think I have offended you, and I would not do so for the world. Are not your happiness, your peace of mind, your honour, bound up with mine ? and can you have a trouble, from within or without henceforth, in which I do not share, even if I do not know why ?’

‘ Ah, Eleanor !’ he murmured, his face still bowed and hidden, ‘ but if you *did* know !’

Yes, if she had known, even in part, the cause of this depression, her courage would have sunk ; but believing it to arise mainly from physical causes, she persisted in her endeavour to cheer his spirits, and thus unconsciously cheered her own.

‘ When I wished you to be a poor man,’ she said, ‘ I was a foolish woman, and an egotistical one. I have changed my

mind since then ; I have grown first ambitious of doing good, and then fearful of doing it in the wrong way. We hear so much of the style we are to live in, and the display we are to make ; and I know all that must be attended to ; but there are better things still which we cannot talk about—as the affection that selected that diamond locket outweighs the diamonds themselves. Those are what I dream of, when I think of to-morrow. I love to think that you who know, as men sometimes know, but women never, will teach me how good can best be done with large means ; that wherever we find struggling honesty, we shall gain a friend ; that there will not be an hospital or a charity, with which your house is connected, in which the poor and suffering will not learn to love our names, for the love we have shown, the sacrifices we have made for them.'

Her own eyes had grown so dim with the moisture her unwonted earnestness had called up, she did not see the expression in his. He had had time, while she was speaking, to command his voice, and his answer was firmer than before.

'You, at least, Eleanor, will deserve respect and gratitude ; if you do not receive them, it is because the earth is not worthy of such angels as you !'

Madame Alençon's shop, one of the charming combinations of French elegance and English business habits, only to be seen in London, was a favourite resort of the Miss Pierpoints, who, but for the limited dimensions of their purses, would have been among the most liberal of her customers. As it was, they had longer bills there than anywhere else, and would have lengthened them cheerfully, had she seen fit to allow it : Madame was, however, too good a woman of business to allow any lady to be oppressed by her liabilities ; and she must have been a bold and skilful diplomatist, who passed the line laid down by fixed, though unpromulgated, laws, in the mind of the head of the house. Always courteous, often insinuating, Madame Alençon ruled her fair customers with a sway despotic as fashion, and her velvet hold was not the less firm, because she rarely found it necessary to reveal the iron. The Miss Pierpoints were always welcomed, for they dressed well, and their taste was commendable, and they had a large circle of acquaintance, and so were a good connexion ; but they knew as well as she did how far they might go, and ever since one unpleasantly polite application to Sir John, they had all been

on the most friendly understanding imaginable. At this present time, they were on terms that might be called affectionate; for they had introduced Miss Ormonde, and Miss Ormonde, among many other primitive, country-bred habits—excellent, no doubt, but decidedly old-fashioned—had a way of paying ready money, to which Madame Alençon took very kindly. It was not hard to persuade the young lady into expensive purchases; she was too diffident of her own taste and judgment not to be talked down by her friends, when they assured her such and such things were absolutely necessary, and could only be obtained at the best shops; but no arguments could make her believe that it was better not to pay for things when you had them. Not to pay was, to her innocent notions, to be in debt; and of debt her horror was so great as to be a constant fund of entertainment and raillery, especially when Mr Atterbury was by. Nevertheless, as we said before, Madame Alençon's gracious smiles attested her approval of the habit; and under cover of Miss Ormonde's punctuality her fair bridesmaids obtained a degree of licence as gratifying as convenient. They were quite in their element directly they entered this enchanted region; fluttering about the fascinating counters, examining, criticizing, and admiring the various novelties and revivals of taste with a discriminating appreciation, in marked contrast with the indifference of the bride elect, whose attention was constantly distracted by the listless, weary looks of her lover. One subject, however, interesting her nearly, roused her to attend in earnest. Madame Alençon was in sad trouble—quite desolated; such a disgrace had never occurred before—she was overwhelmed, annihilated, when she heard it—but, in short! The beautiful French handkerchiefs of Mademoiselle, that had been entrusted to their best embroideress—a young woman well known to Miss Luke, the forewoman, and whom they had employed for years—she had just been there to say, were stolen from her—stolen in the omnibus as she was bringing them home! Figure to yourselves, Mesdemoiselles, a young woman being so careless with valuable goods! For the rest, it was not likely to be true: she had imposed on Miss Luke, who was good as an angel, and Madame had just discovered that she had a husband, a worth-nothing, who had been transported for robbery; and after that, what would you have? The young woman might be honest—it was just possible—but she could not be trusted again; it was an affair ended. If Miss Ormonde was good

enough to pardon the delay, the handkerchiefs could be replaced, no doubt, but not by to-morrow—and Madame was desolated again.

So, judging by her face, was Miss Ormonde. Clara Pierpoint had no idea, as she said, that Eleanor would have shown so much concern about an article of dress. To be sure, she supposed some arrangement must be come to—it would not do for the house to bear all the loss; but, after all, it was not enough to make her look so horrified. She appealed to Mr Atterbury; he listened to the story, retailed by both French and English narrators, with great philosophy; agreed with Madame that it looked awkward—the woman's tale was a lame one, but there would not be much gained by prosecuting. Better put up with one loss than risk two. He must have the gratification of replacing the handkerchiefs, and nothing more need be said about the matter.

Nothing more? Eleanor Ormonde's eyes told a very different tale. What was to become of the poor woman, if her work was taken away from her? Why was she to be treated as guilty because her husband had done wrong? Who could prove that she had told an untruth? Robberies were often committed in public conveyances, and this might be one of them. She was sure Madame Alençon would not willingly commit an injustice, but she should never rest till the case had been made clear. Madame was fervent in her protestations that justice should be done; the poorest had their right to justice, she knew, and in England, the poor man's house was his castle. It was like Miss Ormonde's goodness—the goodness of which all the world spoke—to think so charitably of that unfortunate. Her address? Certainly, if Mademoiselle wished it. Miss Luke would give it her—the orders lay in her department: and Miss Luke having written it down, Eleanor for once exerted her bridal prerogative, and hurried them all away.

'Millbank Street, Westminster,' was her reply to the footman's inquiry for orders; a reply that nearly took away the breath of Miss Pierpoint, who had not had the remotest idea of her intention.

'My dear Eleanor! you have no conception what that locality is—you can do no good by going yourself, and are sure to be imposed upon! Mr Atterbury, do use the authority you are to assume to-morrow, and put a stop to this, or we shall never get through half we have to do.'

No, Atterbury would not thwart his fair betrothed ; if she chose to explore Jacob's Island, he would go with her. So, after a little discussion, it was agreed that the Miss Pierpoints should be set down at the Water Colour Exhibition, and that the others should pick them up on their way back.

'Good-bye, my dear,' said Clara, as she left them ; 'when you have lived a little longer in London, you will learn to think like other people.'

'I hope she will do no such thing,' retorted Atterbury, as they drove away.

There was some little difficulty in finding the right house in Millbank Street, and while the footman was inquiring at one door after another, Atterbury's attention was suddenly arrested by the sight of his youthful emissary in the act of jumping into a Hansom. A quick sign with his hand catching the boy's eye, he was by the carriage in a moment. His master knew by his face he had something to tell.

'The poor woman lives here, Frederick,' said Miss Ormonde, preparing to alight, as they drew up to a small shop ; 'it is not very disagreeable to you, is it ?'

'Disagreeable? Not at all ; take care where you go—I will wait here as long as you like—don't think about me.'

'You are not coming with me, then ?' said she, in a tone of much disappointment.

'I? Why should I? You will manage much better without me. I should only frighten her—I should be sure to let out I thought her no good. I am the worst hand in the world at a benevolent visit—always say rude things, and get into trouble. You had better not ask me to attempt it.'

She said no more, though an expression of pain crossed her face. He handed her out of the carriage, saw her enter the dingy passage, and the door closed behind her. Then, with well-assumed carelessness, strolled up the pavement towards Abingdon Street, with Joe at his heels, watching him with that terrier-like vigilance mentioned before.

'Well, Joe ?' as soon as they were safely out of reach of the footman's long ears, 'what have you done ?'

'Caught him up, sir, three streets off—followed him in the cab as he got into a 'bus, right down to the Waterloo station. There he waited, and I waited, till he met an old gentleman from Australia, with a servant and a lot of luggage, and they got into a cab, and I followed 'em in the Hansom, till I see them go into a house in that street opposite, sir.

You can't see it without you go up a little way. It's a Mrs Brown as keeps the house, sir, and lets lodgings, and there's a young lady in mourning, and an old woman, staying there. From the country, they said she was.'

'*They?* Who told you?'

'The servant girl, sir; I see her run out with a jug, so I met her at the public-house, and got her to talk. The young gentleman don't lodge there hisself, sir, but he's going to stop dinner.'

'Very interesting news;' said Atterbury, affecting to yawn; 'at any rate, I have won my bet, and that will be five shillings in your pocket, Joe, so long as you don't chatter. That street, did you say?'

'Yes, sir—thank ye, sir—Great College Street, they call it. You can see the house if you walk up a little way.'

'Well, just to make sure,' said his master, negligently; and, with a beating heart, he crossed the street, and was turning the corner, when a tall man in a straw hat, lounging leisurely along with his eyes to the Victoria Tower, knocked up against him and nearly pushed him down. Atterbury's angry exclamation bringing his eyes to the ordinary level, they stared at each other, at first in mutual resentment, but soon with surprised recognition. Frederick's lips curled in disdain, while the other, with a coward look of deprecation, slowly touched his hat.

'I beg your pardon, Mr Frederick, I'm sure—if I had seen who it was—I humbly hope you have your health, sir, and my honoured master that was——'

Atterbury made a slight sign; the man's features expressed deep concern.

'Indeed, sir! Dear, dear, so good, so honourable a gentleman——'

Atterbury shrugged his shoulders, as if rejecting praise from such a source, and was moving on, but the man detained him anxiously.

'I am sure, Mr Frederick, you are too good yourself to bring up anything against a poor fellow who has seen the error of his ways, and only wants to make a new character. I did hope I should meet with no one that knew me, but I feel, sir, you are much too good——'

'I thought you were transported long ago,' said Atterbury. 'What are you doing here?'

'I am in service, sir. A gentleman brought me back with

him from Australia. I have my pardon all correct, sir—he got it for me for my good conduct, and I hope to deserve his trust, sir, indeed.’

‘I dare say you will: if he is fool enough to trust you, he deserves all he will get. I wouldn’t; but it is no affair of mine. Now, what are you following me for? Do you really think I have nothing else to do but to trouble myself about a fellow like you?’

‘Oh no, sir; you are much too good, and too great, I know: but if you *should* by chance meet my master, Mr Clavering—’

Atterbury turned upon him with a look that made him start; thrust him from his path with an ejaculation of bitter contempt, and strode back to the carriage. He did not see the scowl that followed him, or hear the muttered vow of revenge—but the boy did, and they haunted him long after.

It was nothing new to Eleanor Ormonde to visit the poor—in her Devonshire village she was as well known as the church-steeple—but it was the first time she had penetrated a London lodging-house of this description; and though the present specimen was by no means one of the worst, she was almost daunted at the onset by the dirty walls and close smell. However, she persevered, and hearing Mrs Mackay lived on the second floor, mounted the staircase heroically. A sharp-looking child on the landing, not the least shy or put out by being spoken to, with a face which Miss Ormonde longed to have washed on the spot, showed her Mrs Mackay’s door; and her gentle tap, after a short delay, brought Mrs Mackay herself to open it. Her surprise at the sight of the well-dressed visitor changed into terror when she heard her name. She stammered something, no one could have guessed what, but which Eleanor took for granted was a welcome; and a very uninviting chair was accepted from politeness, with an inward self-congratulation that Frederick had been left below.

‘I heard from Madame Alençon, just now,’ she began, catching the infection of her listener’s nervousness, ‘that you are in great trouble about some work of mine, Mrs Mackay—and I thought I would call and see if—if I could’—(she began to hesitate here, and to blush)—‘if there was anything I could do—or advise—or——’ She came to a full stop there. Mrs Mackay sighed heavily, and curtsied: she looked too sick and exhausted to speak.

'I wanted to see you myself,' Miss Ormonde went on, growing more and more nervous every minute, 'as I shall be—leaving town to-morrow, and—and—I know you are a first-rate worker, and I thought, if you had nothing else to do, you would undertake some embroidery I am very particular about—some frocks that I wish to send as a present into the country. If you will call this evening at Sir John Pierpoint's—here is my card—my maid will give you the pattern, and all necessary instructions. No, now pray, don't cry like that—I cannot bear to see it!'

She spoke the literal truth, for the sight of tears unmanned her as no danger ever could; and when she rose to soothe the weeping woman, she was trembling from head to foot. The gush of emotion, however, relieved that poor heart and brain, and now the tale of her misery could be told, secure of the sympathy radiating from the kind, honest eyes of her hearer.

'I've worked for Madame Alençon, ma'am, near upon five year, and Miss Luke, the head lady there, knows me well, and has been a kind friend to me, ma'am; oh yes, very kind. I've had work regular there, for I learnt of a Frenchwoman, and ladies has often said they thought my embroidery was done in Paris. And two year ago, ma'am, I was in much better lodgings, and had things respectable about me; but I've been in heavy trouble, ma'am, very heavy trouble, I have, and now it's brought up against me, and I wish I was in my grave, only for my poor little children, and my husband's father—he is in the next room to this, ma'am, helpless as a child, and depending on me. The parish give him a small allowance, but me and my girls has to wait on him like a baby—yes, ma'am—and I can't do the quantity of work as I used, and I was afraid those beautiful handkerchiefs would never be ready. Miss Luke, she was very kind, and gave them to me in good time, for she said the young lady had particularly begged none of the workwomen should be hurried: it was very good of you, ma'am, to think of that. But I had to hurry at last; there was a deal of fine stitches in that pattern, and I was so tired and felt so ill, ma'am—my side and my breathing is that bad sometimes, I can hardly walk—and I took the omnibus part of the way. Oh, ma'am, I wish I had walked, even if I had died when I got there! There was a smart person got in soon afterwards, as if she had watched me, and she stumbled over my feet getting in, and I gave her a hand, leaving my parcel in my lap, and she had hardly sat down before she called out



as she was in the wrong 'bus, for she wanted to go to Camberwell: that's just the other way, ma'am, you know, over the bridge. The man let her out, and soon after I felt for my parcel, and it was gone! I jumped out, and run—I can't tell you, ma'am, how I run—but nothing could I see of her. I went to the police-station—I don't care how many police knows of it—and I've offered a reward. I've clothes enough left to pay for it, and I told Miss Luke so, but she didn't believe me, I know. She said Madame would never employ me again.'

'But she will when she finds out you have spoken the truth?'

'No, ma'am; she says they can't trust a woman again whose husband is——' Here her tears broke out afresh, and it was only by soothing words that the rest could be extracted. Her husband had been clerk in a tradesman's counting-house, had been in a position of trust, had been tempted, and had fallen. There was no palliating the fact; she did not attempt it; he was undergoing his penalty, and all she could do was to try and keep things decent, and their name respectable, so that he might have something to fall back upon when he came home.

'He promised me faithfully, ma'am, that when he came back he would be another man; but he'll find it hard work to start afresh, I know that. Oh, ma'am, he was sadly tempted, and I must say his masters were very hard upon him, for if it hadn't been for the dishonest things he had seen them do, he might have been saved from all this. But they knew he had found them out, and they was glad to be rid of him—I know they was. I showed all the papers—I have 'em all here—to a good gentleman once, and he said it was quite a case to bring before the Home Secretary, but I don't know how to set about it, you see, ma'am.'

'I will inquire for you. I will ask Mr Atterbury,' said Eleanor, 'only I am afraid you must wait till we come back to town.'

'Thank you, ma'am, I'm sure. I can never be thankful enough for your goodness. Oh, ma'am!' as Miss Ormonde slid gold into her hands, 'I didn't want to beg of you, indeed!'

'I am quite aware of that, but as I may not see you for some time, it may be convenient to have something on account.

No, do not deprive me of the pleasure of helping you. A wife who is trying to do what you are doing, deserves the help and sympathy of every woman.'

'God bless you, ma'am; and I hope it is not too great a liberty to wish you your health and happiness, as I do, I'm sure.' And in the fulness of her gratitude she would have detained the young lady much longer, if Eleanor's fears of overstraining the complaisance of her betrothed had not made her take rather a hasty leave, promising to call again on her return to town.

Absorbed in her benevolent purposes, she went into the whole detail without delay, happily unaware that he did not hear a word, until, in reply to a repeated question, he answered as indifferently as possible, 'Those people are always rogues, more or less.'

'Frederick! no one could see that poor woman, and think anything so cruel!'

'Ah, well—yes, I dare say. I know nothing about it. Only I have always found them so.'

'But is it not hard that she should suffer for her husband's disgrace, when she is trying to redeem his good name?'

'A woman who marries a rogue must expect disgrace,' was the curt reply, in such a tone as effectually silenced her till they had been rejoined by their friends.

The evening passed tranquilly without incident, Atterbury being the only guest at Sir John's table, and all parties, by tacit consent, avoiding every topic on which any emotion could be excited. It was not till she was safe in the solitude of her own apartment that the oppression which had gradually gathered upon Eleanor's spirits found relief in tears.

Favoured as she seemed by nature and fortune, it was at an hour like this that the loneliness of her position made itself felt. She had no relations within reach, no intimate friends: her guardian and his daughters showed her all the good-will and kindness in their power, but beyond a certain point their minds had never amalgamated; she could not have breathed to either of them the vague fear and sadness that made her prospect so dark just now. Her parents had died in India, and with the aunt who supplied their place she had spent a quiet, happy, useful country life, in a lovely part of Devonshire, enjoying the advantages of a liberal education, with those of a refined social circle—advantages painfully missed,

since the death of Mrs Mornay had compelled her to accept the protection of her other guardian. All the admiration she received among Sir John Pierpoint's acquaintance had failed to compensate for the superior tone of that to which she had been accustomed; and though too gentle and too well bred to betray fastidiousness, she had early learned to do without intimacy, and, when needful, to stand alone. Yielding, sometimes diffident, on unimportant matters, wherever she thought a principle was concerned she could be very decided, and her straightforward simplicity always carried her point, without even exposing her to ridicule. On the contrary, her reputation for goodness only added to her popularity, and won her quite as much flattering praise as her beauty; rather more, it may be presumed, than was exactly wholesome for anybody. The Pierpoints indulged her, even where they thought her a little too scrupulous, secure that any concession made to her conscience would be more than repaid by her good-natured complaisance to their wishes. There was nothing she might not have had for the asking, but that which no one now could give. Since her engagement, one care had superseded all others, the desire of making Frederick Atterbury happy. And now that a secret doubt of her own power had begun to take a visible form, words cannot describe how sorely she longed for the dear friend she had lost, in whom she might have confided her anxiety, and from whom received comfort and advice. She sat by the window long after the house was hushed and still, looking up at the summer sky, at that hour as clear as in her own dear Devonshire, asking herself what it was possible for her to do, more than she had done, to show her fidelity, her devotion to the man she loved. He was not happy, that she knew too well; but he had solemnly assured her of his trust, and to that assurance she clung for comfort in the harassing doubt which his manner had thrown on his affection. This, at least, she would deserve; come what might, however his cares and occupations might irritate his nerves, and give him the appearance of unkindness—it could only be appearance—he should find her love always the same, “bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things.” And, yielding to the thoughts linked with those noble words, her tears fell more softly, her heart grew more calm, and she laid her burden where so many have been laid—where none were ever laid in vain.

Thus, at the entrance of the terrible arena, in which she

was to face a martyr's struggle, we leave her for the present, to gain the martyr's strength.

The stars of that calm night looked down on many sorrows in the vast city stretched out beneath their ray—some borne from one gay scene to another, disguised in smiles, and crowned with flowers—some keeping watch by dying-beds—some tossing restlessly on their own. Anne Clavering was among these last: she had retired early at her uncle's urgent entreaty, leaving Edward to tell what she had not strength for; and at first, exhaustion had brought her repose. But it was short and feverish, and by the time Edward was gone, and the household at rest, she was too excited to bear any longer the vain struggle after sleep. She rose, partly dressed herself, sponged her head copiously with cold water, and resolved to try what an hour's study would do towards tiring her into tranquillity. It was all in vain—the book lay open, but the mind was elsewhere; and she gradually relinquished the attempt, sitting with her head thrown back, and her hands pressed on her brow, as wave after wave of bitterness, resentment, disappointed hopes, and unsatisfied yearnings, came rolling over her spirit, threatening to make shipwreck alike of judgment and reason.

'Oh, if I could but see him again—only for one minute before I lose him for ever, I could bear it more quietly—I could almost be satisfied!' had been her inward ejaculation so often, she at last uttered it aloud, and startled herself from her reverie. This would never do—she should never sleep if she sat thinking of *him*; she must try and work a little, if her burning eyes would allow her; and with wary steps she moved into the deserted sitting-room in quest of her materials. The half-drawn curtain giving a glimpse of the beauty of the night, she was tempted to linger, and drawing her large shawl about her throat, with her black hair flung back from her temples, she approached the window.

What was it she saw in the street below? The face of a man looking up at the house—looking up with those glowing eyes which she saw whenever she closed her own. Paralysed, scarcely breathing, she looked down in return, as we gaze in a dream on one that we know is dead. The eyes met hers, and they once more beheld each other across that unfathomable gulf, which nothing could close again. One moment, and no more, that wild despairing gaze endured, for at the

sound of an approaching footstep, Atterbury disappeared in the darkness, and Anne crept back to her bed, on which she sank, almost insensible.

The morning that saw Eleanor Ormonde a wife, found Anne Clavering prostrate with fever.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### SIX WEEKS AFTER.

It was the close of July, and the hotels and lodging-houses of every breezy watering-place were filling rapidly with town-bred visitors, panting to exchange smoke and closeness for the smell and taste of the sea. Every train brought fresh arrivals to take the place of those who had either been induced to 'tempt the wave,' in quest of continental novelties, or had come to the bottom of that holiday purse on which landladies and hotel-keepers never have any mercy. By one of the earliest of those from London, there arrived at Wardenstone one morning a rather shabby-looking elderly gentleman with a very small carpet-bag, who, having previously made a close bargain with a fly-driver, was set down at the door of the crowded hotel.

'Quite full, sir,' was his first greeting; the worn coat and small bag not being exactly in his favour.

'So much the better,' was his dry answer, as he turned into the coffee-room, and put his bag and hat under a chair. 'Some breakfast, directly.'

'Breakfast, sir? Yes, sir. 'Am and eggs, sir?'

'No—a chop, well done; and look sharp about it.'

The tone was not without effect, and the breakfast was brought, and the chop, well done, was leisurely discussed, before the new-comer stirred, or spoke to anybody. When he had quite done, and the waiter had brought him the *Times*, he asked, in a careless manner, if Mr Atterbury was staying there still?

'Oh yes, sir, Mr Atterbury and Mrs Atterbury, sir, and their servants. There is Mr Atterbury's groom crossing the hall now, sir.'

‘Ah! so he is,’ said the gentleman, leaning back in his chair, and opening the paper; ‘send him in.’

The waiter, who had begun to opine there was more in that shabby coat than appeared at first sight, hastened to convey to Joe the stranger’s desire for his presence; a message that affronted that young gentleman beyond measure. If it had not been for some latent curiosity, he would have flatly refused, but that passion prevailing, he went into the coffee-room, under protest, with as much dignity as his position seemed to require. It was rather thrown away; the gentleman just looked up from his newspaper to toss him a card, saying, ‘Take that to your master, Joe, and tell him I am here.’

Joe looked at it, and at him, but showed no enthusiasm.

‘My master and mistress are at breakfast just now, sir,’ said he, with marked emphasis.

‘I have had mine, so I can wait,’ was the reply, as the gentleman turned the sheet of his paper, and went on with the sentence he had left unfinished. Joe eyed him with increasing dislike, and as if he would have quarrelled with him on the spot with the greatest pleasure; but as no further notice was taken of him, he had only the satisfaction of making his exit as imposing as his entrance.

‘Who is he? What is he?’ whispered one or two waiters, who had watched the proceedings with great interest.

‘Only our man of business,’ was the answer, in a tone that would have been perfect in its revenge, could the party alluded to but have heard it; and, much refreshed by the observation, he went up with the card to his master.

The handsomest apartments in the hotel were those assigned to Frederick Atterbury and his bride, which, after a tour in Wales, they had now occupied for a fortnight. The breakfast-table was covered with every delicacy of the season, and Eleanor, presiding over the tea equipage, looked all the fresher and lovelier for the pure air she had been inhaling the last six weeks. Still there was a pensiveness in her eyes, and an unconscious timidity in the tone of her voice, that betrayed the existence of that undefined care, which had ‘cast its shadow before’ on the eve of the bridal; and the worn, restless, irritable expression of her husband’s face would have accounted for it, had it been ten times more. Tasting everything in turn, and finding fault with all, his fevered appetite

rejecting the most successful efforts of the *chef's* ingenuity as if they had been gravel and ashes, he had contrived to make his gentle partner's breakfast a feast of bitter herbs—not so much from the failure of her attempts to please him, as from the dread of his being really unwell, and refusing to own it. She had just been rebuked for looking at him in that anxious way—didn't she know he could never bear to be watched?—and was wondering whether it would be a breach of duty to contrive a visit from the clever Dr Z——, who had come down yesterday, and might check the mischief in time—when Joe entered with the card. Her heart beat fast as she detected Atterbury's change of colour. 'What is it?' she asked, seeing him with his eyes fixed on the card as if in thought. He looked up with a start and a laugh, and threw it across the table. 'Only old Martock come boring down about some of your affairs, I suppose: unless it is on his own. I believe half this hotel belongs to him. Where is he, Joe?'

'In the coffee-room, sir.'

'Is he in a hurry?'

'Oh no, sir, not at all. He said he could wait, as he had had his breakfast,' said Joe, literally.

This seemed some relief. 'As he has taken the trouble of coming, we must have him up, Eleanor, I suppose. You monopolize all his attention now you have promoted him to be your chief counsellor; he never minds a word I say to him now.'

Mrs Atterbury could have said he never minded her either, for since Mr Martock, on the death of her aunt's old friend and lawyer, Mr Groves, had undertaken the management of her affairs, she had not been allowed to have an opinion about them, and had assented nominally to more changes and new arrangements in the last few months, than had taken place under Mrs Mornay's regency in as many years. It had been to please Frederick and Sir John that she had accepted this new minister, and the respect they all paid to Mr Martock's extreme sagacity and cleverness, made her ashamed to acknowledge the instinctive aversion she felt for his presence—still more the doubts of the soundness of his advice, that she could not avoid, when she found all her old friend's opinions treated as unworthy discussion. It was the more difficult, that he never paid her more attentions than he could help; indeed, he sometimes appeared to think she

had not even common sense ; and, therefore, rebellion against his authority would look very like personal pique and mortified vanity. Something of this might have been expressed in her face, for Frederick rather eagerly went on : ‘ You don’t mind his coming up here, do you ? I would not have him think himself neglected, you see. He is old, and might take it into his head that you were high, or something. I am sure you would not wish that.’

‘ No, indeed ; far from it,’ she replied, with sincerity, preparing the more cheerfully for the interview, that she hoped the change of a little business would give a turn to his spirits. She would not even risk a word of objection when he turned to a liqueur-case, of which she had begun to stand in dread, and swallowed some brandy in haste, before meeting his legal adviser at the door, with both hands extended.

‘ Well, Martock, how are you ? Come down for a sea-breeze, eh ? or have you something for my wife to do ? We are rather late at breakfast, so you are just in time. Come in and try what the Wardenstone *cuisine* is like.’

Mr Martock did not seem to respond much to this cordial greeting, but bowed formally to Eleanor, as he replied he had some papers for Mrs Atterbury to sign ; there was no immediate hurry ; he could wait her leisure. He had already breakfasted, he thanked her. And down he sat, with his hat under his chair, crossed his legs, and began carefully and deliberately to fold his large thread gloves one in the other, as if he had come down for no other purpose. Atterbury fidgetted about the room—rang the bell in rapid succession three times to have the breakfast things removed—opened and shut the window, lighted and flung away two cigars, and at last threw himself full length on the sofa, asking, with an affected yawn of indifference, ‘ Anything new ? the world grown honest yet ? ’

‘ I hope not,’ said the visitor.

‘ Ay, it will be an ugly day for you lawyers, when it is.’

‘ Very ugly ; we shall have no more clever people to watch, so our work will be nearly over. How do you like Wardenstone, Mrs Atterbury ? ’

‘ Very much, for a short stay.’

‘ Ah ! you probably intend running over to France ? ’

‘ We had talked of it, but nothing is decided.’

‘ Nothing is decided : no, I suppose not—I suppose not ; and all things considered, I should be inclined to recommend



its remaining so. Can you spare me a few minutes now, or shall I wait? I have a couple of hours to spare.'

'Have you?' cried Atterbury, springing up, 'then wait by all means, and come out with me. It will be all the same to my wife, I know. Come out and have a weed on the beach—I am dying for one.'

'With you, if you please, but without the weed. Mrs Atterbury will not favour us with her company?'

Eleanor saw her husband's impatient gesture, and hastened to excuse herself, on the plea of morning avocations; a reasonable plea enough, but hardly borne out by the result; for when left alone she could fix her mind upon nothing. Work, letter-writing, and books, were all tried in vain; she could not sit still, she could think of nothing but Frederick's nervous state, and the probability of Mr Martock having brought him bad news. Ignorant as she was supposed to be of all business matters, she knew well enough that bankers, like other mercantile men, were exposed to risks and difficulties, and it was just possible that Atterbury's house, with all its wealth, might have had losses of late, of which she had not heard. If he only would confide in her, and let her sympathize with him! Surely, if it were so, it would be as well to avoid unnecessary expense; and without exciting attention, or causing remark, quietly make all their arrangements accordingly. The Pier-points had appeared to expect them to adopt a style of living which she had all along felt to be unsuitable, though she was silenced at the time. Their station in society was not one to justify it, even as a matter of taste—to say nothing of principle. She was glad to think she had persuaded him to take a house of reasonable size, instead of the ostentatious mansion on which her friends had set their hearts; and Frederick should see, if he would only trust her, that comfort and elegance were to be enjoyed on much less costly terms than he supposed.

She sighed as she once more took up the book she had brought from London to study so carefully, and of which she had not yet read six pages. How many of her hopeful plans had already proved abortive! How far she was from possessing that intimate knowledge of her husband's thoughts, that she had longed for—how difficult it was to confide hers to him—how utterly vain to dream she alone could make him happy! She thought over this till she grew so sad at heart,

it roused her to the necessity of exertion ; and with a strenuous effort to shake off what looked like faithless discontent, she resolutely took out her drawing, and began to copy one of Frederick's spirited sketches. Her skill was so inferior to his, she found sufficient difficulty to make the occupation interesting, and the time slipped away unawares, till her husband's laugh in the passage made her heart leap with unexpected delight. In he came, with a glowing face, and evidently in much improved spirits.

'Here she is, Martock, as busy as ever. Come in, and get your business done while you can, for I give you notice, we are not going to stay broiling in here this glorious day, for you or anybody. What has she been doing? Actually trying to draw! Well done, Eleanor! and if, like Pat's stocking, it had only a new toe, and a new heel, and a new leg, there would be nothing left to be desired. Lend me hold of your brush, and I'll darn the holes while you and Martock are at your accounts. You do not want me there.'

'I wish we did,' said Eleanor, as she gave him up her seat. 'It is by no choice of mine that the trouble is not all on your shoulders, I assure you, sir. Mr Martock smiles, but if he confessed the truth, he would own he wishes it was.'

'Humph!' said Mr Martock, as he took some papers from his ample pockets. 'I rather think, Mrs Atterbury, I prefer things being as they are.'

'I am sure, Mr Martock, it would be more agreeable to deal with some one more capable of appreciating your good advice.'

'Perhaps; but no, I am disposed to think otherwise. People may be too clever and capable for the peace of their legal advisers. Please to put your name there, and there, and there. You understand what that means, at any rate, and I should not recommend your troubling yourself any further.'

'I cannot always follow your recommendation,' she said, in a low voice, under cover of the loud whistling with which Atterbury accompanied the rapid demolition of her morning's work. 'I was foolish enough to fancy you might have brought him bad news.'

'Ladies' fancies about business generally *are* foolish,' was his reply, as he took up the paper she had signed.

'Then you have not, on your honour?' persisted she, as if she could not help it.

‘On my honour,’ said he, smiling, ‘I have brought him no news at all.’

She gave a sigh of relief. ‘Then you have come all this way on my account? I am sorry you took so much trouble; you might have sent your clerk.’

‘I might, certainly; but in your service, Mrs Atterbury, nothing is a trouble.’

‘The politest thing I ever heard you say, Mr Martock, and it encourages me to trouble you a little more. I wanted to ask you (as you know everything that anybody wishes to know, and many things that they do not), is there any chance of obtaining a pardon for a man who has embezzled money entrusted to him?’

Atterbury’s brush stopped—he looked up, listening breathlessly. Mr Martock, who was sealing up his papers, went on slowly dropping the melted wax on his envelope, as if his life depended upon the accuracy of the impression. The silence surprising Eleanor, she repeated the question.

‘Well,’ he replied, looking intently at his seal, before pressing it down, ‘I would not advise any friend of yours to run the risk on the chance.’

‘Is it, then, so very difficult in the case of a poor clerk, exposed to temptation, not only from poverty, but from seeing his employers dishonest themselves? I would not say a word if it were one of them—men comparatively rich, with respectable characters, and yet all the while guilty of fraud—but this is such a pitiable case. Can anything be done?’

Mr Martock could give no opinion on a case whereof he knew nothing. The usual way, he believed, was to memorialize the Home Secretary. Had Mrs Atterbury any personal interest in the matter?

‘None,’ Eleanor replied, ‘beyond that of compassion for the wife.’

‘Oh, he has a wife, has he? Poor woman. It is very good of you to take an interest in her. Wives in that unfortunate position are apt to lose all their friends.’

‘I do not believe it, Mr Martock. I think better of human nature than you do.’

‘Because you know less; but you have time and opportunities before you. You will be able to teach *me* by-and-by.’

‘What are you two arguing about?’ interrupted Atterbury, rising. ‘Is it that Westminster case, Eleanor? I tell you

frankly, I won't have you meddle with it. Cosset the woman if you choose, but let the man alone. It is not an affair for you; you will have enough to do if you listen to all these tales.' He came up to her, and stroked her hair, as if to soften the prohibition. 'Your heart is too good for your head, Eleanor, or you would see the absurdity yourself.'

'Nevertheless,' said Mr Martock, slowly brushing his hat with his sleeve, 'since Mrs Atterbury has done me the honour of consulting me, I shall certainly give the subject my serious consideration. There can be no harm in her knowing to whom to apply, should she ever, by any unforeseen accident, find it necessary.' And with a patronizing smile that annihilated her much more effectually than any argument, he wrote Mrs Mackay's address in his pocket-book, shook hands, and took leave.

'Sneering old hound!' was Atterbury's muttered comment, through his grinding teeth.

'Frederick! your own particular friend!'

'Yes, yes, I know he is my friend, and that is the worst of it. He pesters and worries one with his opinion and advice; and because he is, as you say, one's own particular friend, one must not pitch him down-stairs. He is gone now, and we will not think of him any more. Oh, by-the-by, I did a bold thing just now, when I was out. A steamer was just starting from the pier, on an excursion trip of some hours, and our trusty adherents, Jones and Benson, were looking on with longing eyes that I could not resist, so I gave them both a holiday. Mrs Benson had sundry scruples about her mistress, but I promised you should not miss her. Did I presume too much? Can you exist without your tirowoman?'

'Indeed I hope so: I was only surprised and rather amused at your thinking of it. Poor things, they like a change as well as we do, I dare say; and if a steamer is a pleasure to anybody, I am not the one to grudge it!'

'But now I want you to come on an excursion with me; I long to get away from all this bustle, and hide ourselves somewhere for a night. Will you come? Can you pack up? I will help you: I am a first-rate packer, on an entirely new principle. I had an eye to this fun, in getting rid of Benson.'

She agreed to all he proposed, except to letting him pack. He set his heart on her taking a portmanteau that had belonged to her aunt, and still bore the name of 'Mrs Mornay'

on a brass plate outside, and in this he made her put a great many things she would have left behind, answering all her remonstrances by the argument that there was no saying where they might go, and they could do no harm. Above all, he insisted on her taking all her jewels.

‘You have not many with you, but more than you would like to lose, and Benson is out of the way, and these places are full of light-fingered folk. Besides, I may take you visiting a friend of mine for all I know, and I must have you in your ornaments.’

Whatever pleased him pleased her, so she let him have his own way, and having settled her arrangements to his satisfaction, he hurried off to make his own. He told the hotel-keeper and head-waiter that he was going on an excursion, which would keep him away one night, perhaps two. His letters and papers were to be taken care of, and his servants would wait till his return. As it was possible some boxes might arrive from abroad, for which there might be a heavy charge, he left a ten-pound note with the landlord, notwithstanding the polite assurances of its being unnecessary. He then looked into the coffee-room, exchanged greetings with his acquaintance, and casually mentioned his intention. The weather was so tempting, he might be away some days—they should not tie themselves down to any fixed plan, but just follow the inclination of the hour. Public opinion, though liberal in suggestions, decided he was right on the whole, and very much to be envied; and when, shortly after, he was seen departing with his wife, his face all eager animation, and hers bright with sunny smiles, there was not an eye that did not follow them with interest, as the happiest young couple in the world.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### THE MERRY ANGLER.

ELEANOR had not been, for many a long month, so happy as she was that day. Her husband had never seemed so free from care, or so determined on enjoyment, as when they were

seated alone together in the railway carriage that was to take them to Stonesbury. All his gloom and irritability had departed with Mr Martock ; and after all her fears and anxiety, to see him sketching ridiculous likenesses of everybody at the stations, was the most delicious relief imaginable. His manner had lost its impatient roughness ; it was full of kindness and solicitude for her comfort and enjoyment ; and more than once, when he thought himself unobserved, she found his eyes fastened upon her with a steadfast admiration, that gave her more pleasure than she might have liked to avow. She could not resist, at last, the impulse to meet his eyes, and let him see he was detected. He laughed as he answered the look.

‘It is very true ; I do not know what your designs may be, but I never saw you look so well.’

‘You never saw me to better advantage, perhaps : I am so happy.’

‘You ought always to be happy then ; it is evidently your native element. And why you should not, I cannot imagine ; you have nothing on your mind, no care or trouble, except myself and Mrs Benson : we contrive, between us, to plague you a little. I wonder what you would really do,’ he continued a little while after, when they were drawing slowly up to the small station of Twalmley, ‘if some great smashing misfortune came down upon you ; if you would go on looking as provokingly good-tempered and patient as when I bother your life out about nothing at all, and Benson bullies you out of wearing what you like best—or whether you would grow sour and crabbed and selfish like other people ?’

‘I would rather not be tried ; I feel as if I could bear a great deal just now, with you at hand to praise my fortitude. I think I have shown that already, by submitting so quietly to your treatment of my drawing. I did not see, till just now, what you had been doing. It really gave me a great deal of trouble, and you have blurred it all over.’

‘Ah !’ he said, colouring hastily as he looked at it, ‘you will find me out in time. What costs you pains to do well I can undo and mar only too easily. *‘Cette leçon vaut bien un fromage, sans doute.’* What place are we stopping at ? Twalmley ! I tell you what, I’m tired of this fun—let us get out here.’

He beckoned to the guard to open the door, loaded himself with her goods and his own, and hurried her across the platform before she had time to remonstrate. The official

who received the tickets observed with surprise that they were taken for Stonesbury. 'All right; we do not go on till to-morrow,' was the answer, and still hurrying on, he inquired where he could get a vehicle. A very crazy open fly was the only one forthcoming, and in this they were fain to seat themselves; Eleanor secretly wondering what would come next.

'Where are we, Frederick—and where are we to go?'

'Where are we? In the Arcadian town of Twalmley, where I have not been since I was a boy at school: and we are going to an inn where I used to stay in the holidays, for some of the best fishing I ever had. Is the Merry Angler still in existence, driver?'

'Yes, sir.'

'It has changed landlords since my time, of course?'

'A many times, sir. A Mrs Parsons keeps it now.'

'Quite a new name: well, if it is the old clean snug place, that does not matter. Drive there as fast as you can.'

Fast was not exactly the epithet to be bestowed on the movements of that primeval car, whose first evolutions must have been coeval with Boadicea. The creaking and rattling of the carriage harmonized but too well with the asthmatic wheezing of the old white horse, an interesting study in himself for any one curious in anatomy. But it was all part of the day's adventures, and Eleanor found fault with nothing but the whip—the only thing about her equipage that could boast of liveliness; and this made up for all the rest. She had been nursed in the love of horses, and to see one starved and then deliberately beaten, made her almost fierce. Atterbury laughed at her indignation, but was moved by it to observe, when paying the fare, 'This lady thinks that poor brute of yours would be just as well pleased, my man, if you gave him more corn and less leather.'

The man looked a little astonished, but he pulled the horse's tangled mane, not unkindly, with an apologetic remark that he had been a very good 'oss, a very good one, he had—he was getting old now, and everything was so dear.

'If you fed him a little better——' Mrs Atterbury mildly began.

'I'd feed him better, ma'am, if I could feed myself; but with this here war, everything is riz, and 'osses are double what they was. I did very well a few years ago,' he went on, in an injured tone, as he tied a new lash to his whip, 'but the master as I used to drive for came to a smash, and run away in debt to

everybody, and with all my savings, he did—and me with eight children!’

The growl that accompanied the words was savage in its bitterness. Atterbury turned into the inn without reply; but the mention of the eight children touching Eleanor on her weak point, she hung back to feel for her purse, and ask if his wife were living? Oh yes, and much good she did them—hadn’t been out of her bed this four year—nothing but a trouble and expense *she* was. Hard for her to feel she was a burden? Well, it didn’t seem to trouble her overmuch, and if *he* didn’t complain nobody needn’t. He never found as grumbling did much good, and he never listened to none. ‘Thank ye kindly, ma’am, thank ye kindly, I’m sure. Be kind to old Billy to oblige you? I should be ashamed if I weren’t!’ And thrusting her gratuity into his pocket, he joyfully scrambled up to his seat, whipping up the horse so energetically that he actually broke into a stumbling canter, that soon carried him out of sight.

A little doubtful of the success of her mediation, as well as of the comments Frederick would make on the result, Eleanor turned into the inn, and was considerably relieved to find he was too full of his arrangements for their accommodation with the stout smiling hostess, to have time just then for teasing. A small, clean bed-room, and tolerable sitting-room, were at their disposal, and fresh fish from the river and a roast chicken were promised for their dinner, a dinner at which the gentleman would have stormed in London or at Wardenstone, but which he now pronounced would do capitally. As soon as their goods had been conveyed to their apartment, he made Eleanor come out to see his old favourite haunts. The afternoon was hot, but there was a breeze by the river, and his boyish recollections served him in sufficient stead to guide them to a pretty shaded spot, where turf, and trees, and solitude seemed to invite them to repose. Here they sat down, at his suggestion, and Atterbury, taking off his hat, stretched himself full-length on the grass, with his head on Eleanor’s knees.

‘This is rest!’ he said, with a sigh of pleasure. ‘Let us be perfectly quiet for a little while, and fancy we are alone in the world. I wish we were!’

She made no answer, but silently looked down on him as he lay, with a loving, yearning tenderness, such as she had never yet been bold enough to express, and for which a heart



like hers had no safe outlet but in blessing and prayer. These were her rest during that quiet hour, and unuttered as they were in words, their influence was not unfelt; though Atterbury lay as if asleep—in reality, dreading by a movement to break the spell. It was not till the distant clock had struck the hour for the second time that he roused himself with a sigh, looked at his watch, and rose.

‘We must back to our inn, my Eleanor; the world claims her own, and we must obey perforce, or go without our dinner. I have been pleasant company, have I not?’

‘You have rested yourself, and that was pleasure enough for me.’

‘I quite believe you, and with you I could rest, if it were not for—Eleanor,’ he went on abruptly, after a pause, during which they had begun to move homewards, ‘did you ever read Southey’s ‘All for Love?’

‘No; I am better read in Wordsworth than in Southey. Is it a drama?’

‘It is a lyrical version of an old Latin legend. A young freedman sells himself to the Evil One to obtain the hand of his master’s daughter. The marriage takes place, and the fortunate youth appears at the summit of prosperity, with that pleasant little bill on his mind that may fall due any minute—repenting of his bargain, but hopeless of escaping the penalty. How do you suppose it ends?’

‘By his giving up his wife and retiring to a monastery, I conclude.’

‘Not a bit of it. The Tempter has over-reached himself, and by giving him to a good Christian wife, loses him altogether. You shall read the ballad yourself some day, and tell me what you think of it. Ay,’ he went on, half to himself, for Eleanor was too much struck by his manner to reply, ‘there are more bondsmen than Eleëmon, there are more guardian angels than Cyra! But will the court decide in their favour again?’

‘What are you thinking of, Frederick?’ for he stopped short, looking across the river to the landscape beyond.

‘Thinking?’ said he, with a start, ‘was I thinking? It must have been, then, of the pranks I played here as a youngster, getting up in the middle of the night to fish, and being within an ace of being taken before the magistrate as a poacher. I was uncommonly proud of that afterwards, but scared out of my senses at the time. Come, let us step on;

the mention of fish gives me an appetite, and I am curious to see if they taste as good as I have ever since believed they do. Age and experience dispel so many charming illusions, it will be a luxury to find one remain.'

. It might have been that the cherished illusion failed, but certainly the appetite he had boasted of did not display itself at table. Though he praised everything set before him, and pressed his bride to do justice, she noticed his own attempts were complete failures, and that it was almost a relief to him when the cloth was removed. He drank nearly a bottle of wine, and then took out his sketch-book, and began rapidly throwing off a series of outlines, illustrating the legend he had spoken of. Eleanor stood behind him, looking over his shoulder, and grew painfully interested in the vigorous strokes and touches that set the story before her with such fearful distinctness; the artist himself becoming excited as he went on, and working the groups with more and more dramatic power, till it came to the climax—the deliverance. There his hand seemed to fail; perhaps his imagination was tired; he made one or two abortive attempts, and then threw the pencil on the table.

'I leave that for you, Eleanor. Order up some tea, will you, while I go and see if there are any evening papers.'

The tea was ordered, and ready some time before he returned. Directly he came in, his wife saw something the matter. She started up. 'You have had some bad news?'

'Some news that makes us anxious, certainly—very anxious. I don't know what to do. I ought to go up to town—I must.'

'Do not let that trouble you; I can be ready in five minutes.'

'You, love? You see, that is just the thing. It would never do for you to be seen hurrying back in that sort of way. It would set everybody talking.'

She stood looking at him, the bright colour fading from her cheeks. 'How did you hear? Is it anything in the paper? Do show it me.'

'No, no, not in the paper; it came to me by—by telegraph. I burnt the message, of course. The fact is, Eleanor—don't look so pale and frightened, or I shall not be able to do it—and I was going to test your unselfish courage. Can you bear to wait here by yourself?'

'Of course I can if you wish it,' said she, struggling to keep from any outward agitation.

'No, but shall you be comfortable—without your maid, too?'

'Yes, quite. Do not think about me for a moment. Only decide as you feel to be right. It *is* right, I suppose, that you should go directly?'

'It is absolutely necessary. I have ascertained that a train will stop here in twenty minutes; I can walk down to the station. But it goes to my heart to leave you like this.' And his face was agitated enough to confirm his words. Her loving unselfishness came to the rescue, making her more courageous in reality than in appearance.

'What harm can it do me, dear Frederick, to spend a quiet day here alone? I suppose you will be back to dinner, and I promise you I shall not be dull. I have a dozen letters to write.'

'Yes, but I was going to tell you—there is one thing you do not yet understand. Sit down, and let me make sure you do.' He sat down by her side, and took her hand with a seriousness that riveted her attention.

'In business like mine, you know well, we are liable to seasons of difficulty. I tell you this much, not to make you uneasy, but cautious. It may be of the greatest consequence—I may say it *is*—that nobody should know anything of my movements just at this moment. No one is aware of our being here, and the longer it is concealed the better. Write no letters—show yourself as little as possible, and on no account venture near the station. One thing more—I hardly like to mention it, but it happens that the people here, seeing on your portmanteau the name of Mrs Mornay, have taken it for granted that it is yours—and—I have allowed them to think so.'

'Dearest Frederick—how could you? It is an untruth,' faltered Eleanor, her bravery beginning to give way.

'Come, come, you cannot deny you were christened Eleanor Mornay, so even your dear little scrupulous conscience need not be distressed at being called so. To do me a real service you may for once make your Christian name do a little extra duty. It will only be till—till I come back. You will not refuse me one last favour, will you?'

'To do you a service—till you come back to me—I will do anything you ask, and you know it; but oh! if you love me,

come back soon, or let me follow you. Frederick!' she said, clinging to him, 'you are not deceiving me? You are not keeping from me anything I ought to know?'

'Rest assured,' he replied, slowly and earnestly, 'I have told you all I *can*—all but one thing.' He took her hands in his, and wrung them with a force that left them throbbing long after. 'Deserve your love I never shall; but the day I lose it, my last hope will be gone!'

He pressed his lips on her brow as he spoke the last words, and left her before she could answer them.

'Mrs Parsons,' he said, as he was leaving the inn, 'I entrust Mrs Mornay to your particular care. I am obliged to go up to town to-night, and I know she will be taken care of till I return.' Mrs Parsons promised heartily. 'And one thing I must ask you to be careful about; do not let her see any newspapers.'

'Ah, really, sir! she has some one at the war then, poor dear?'

'Yes, yes—in the Crimea—a brother. I am going up to inquire about him, and I dread any bad news reaching her suddenly. Pray be very careful; I know you will.'

'You may rely on me, Mr Mornay, that you may. I'll watch over the dear lady as if she was my sister; but we shall be very glad to see you back again, sir—the sooner the better. Dear, dear,' as he strode rapidly away, slinging his bag over his shoulder, 'only to think of that sweet young creature left to fret herself alone, so happy as she looked when she came in! Martha, listen for her bell, whatever you do, and I'll go up and see after her myself.'

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### CITY NEWS.

It was some time before Mrs Atterbury gave any opportunity for her hostess's well-meant attention.

The change had been so sudden from the glad serenity of the last few hours, it was only by degrees she could realize it. She sat down by her solitary tea-table, and the twilight deep-

ened and darkened around her without her being able to rouse herself, so much as to move. The more she thought, the more uneasy she grew; but the uneasiness was too strange at first, to make her restless. That did not begin, until, in recalling everything that had passed, it suddenly flashed across her mind—how could a telegraphic message have been sent to him, if nobody knew where he was? The bare possibility of his telling her an untruth was so revolting, she shrank from it as a breach of loyalty, and yet the only other solution or the mystery she could find, was, that his coming to Twalmley had been arranged with Mr Martock. She could imagine the pleasure that gentleman had taken in sending him disagreeable news. He always seemed to grudge everybody a holiday from business; and in the stimulus of a little womanly detestation she was beginning to find some comfort, when another question presented itself. What if the bad news came in the morning, and all that Frederick had been doing since had only been a blind? What, indeed? She could not face the idea for a moment. She was indignant with herself for its having occurred; and rose with a stern resolve to indulge such weakness no longer. Frederick trusted her, and deserved to be trusted in return. It was for him to decide what was fit for her to know of his affairs; it was for her to carry out his wishes, and keep the vow she had prayed over so earnestly, of being his support whenever he needed one. She would sit no longer brooding over imaginary evils, no, nor over evils that might be real. Strange, perplexing as it all was, she would wait patiently till he liked to explain it; he should not find her ill from low spirits when he came back; he was testing her courage—she would show him it could stand the test.

She prayed heartily that it might, keeping back the tears that would have put her resolutions to the blush, and wisely shortened her solitary evening by retiring early to rest. It was, perhaps, the first time in her life that she had done so without the assistance of a maid; but though Mrs Parsons and Martha were both solicitous in offers of service, she preferred doing everything for herself as best she could, to the mortification of being called 'Mrs Mornay,' with the possible contingency of being found out. Thoroughly tired out in body and mind, she slept in consequence much sounder than she could have expected. Mrs Parsons herself waited upon her at breakfast, to see that she had everything she required,

and to hope she had passed a good night. Mr Mornay would be sure to come back to dinner, if possible ; or, if not, he would send, and she must keep up a good heart, and not go fancying mischief before it came. What this meant, Mrs Atterbury did not know, and had not spirits to inquire. Though she tried not to own it to herself, she had taken a chill the day before, when sitting by the river ; and warm as it was in her little apartment when the windows were shut, she shivered when they were open. Headache prevented her employing herself, and her only comfort was in thinking it was perhaps just as well that Frederick was not there to be made uneasy. She lounged in the easiest chair she could find (which is not saying much for it), and dozed part of the day, ashamed of her own idleness, but too oppressed for exertion, when there was no immediate call for it. As the evening approached, however, the hope of her husband's arrival gave her stimulus enough to make her believe she was quite recovered ; and the dinner she had so carefully ordered was delayed, and postponed, and kept hot, and sent up at last by Mrs Parsons in desperation, to be sent down again almost untouched. Night came on, it grew late, and he neither came nor sent ; and too weary to sit up any longer, she yielded at last to the coaxing of her hostess, and went to bed ; this time to pass long feverish hours of restlessness, only soothed by the repeated consolation, ' I shall have a letter to-morrow.'

To-morrow came, a dull, close, rainy morrow, and Mrs Parsons shook her head when she looked at her guest's heavy eyes, and heard her oppressed breathing. She preached with much unction on the duty of cheerfulness and treacle-posset ; and detailed several cases in which, to her certain knowledge, ladies in the most robust health, had, from the neglect of both remedies, ' gone out like the snuff of a candle.' To these very inspiriting anecdotes, Mrs Atterbury listened with her usual amiability, but failed in the application of the moral. She had a slight cold, certainly, but of no consequence whatever ; when the weather cleared up she would try the effect of a little air and exercise, and meanwhile, if Mrs Parsons would get her a newspaper, that was all she wanted. A newspaper ? Oh, certainly. And away went the hostess to give strict orders that no newspaper should be forthcoming on pain of death. Eleanor waited some time, and then rang to renew the request. She was told unblushingly by Martha that it was expected every minute. An hour or two passed before

she asked again. Dear me, Mrs Parsons was so sorry, but in airing it at the kitchen fire, it had caught, and was all in a blaze in a minute. Here was the 'Lady's Handbook of Fashion, and Polite Intelligencer' (how Martha pronounced this title is beyond our skill to describe), which missis hoped would do as well.

It was a daring hope, considering that this exciting periodical was an odd number, five or six years old, illustrated by coloured engravings from 'Le Petit Courier des Dames,' of ladies in those impossibly minute boots and gloves, with a perpetual sickly smile on their faces, as if they were trying to make themselves and you believe that those boots were comfortable, and those gloves did not stop circulation; the letter-press consisting of mild jocularities—fragments of sentimental stories, 'to be continued,' as they might be to the end of time, without anybody being much the wiser—a receipt or two for dyeing grey hair, and taking spots out of silk—and a few valuable hints on dress and deportment the first time you dined in company. Interesting as all this might be, it was not exactly what Mrs Atterbury wanted, and she resolved, as soon as it ceased raining, to venture out and forage for herself; a feat she accomplished unobserved in the course of the afternoon.

Twalmley did not seem to be a place in which literature was in much demand, but in answer to her inquiries for a library, she was at last directed to a modest little shop, where fiction, embroidery patterns, and Berlin wool were dispensed in about equal proportions, and of antiquity also equal. How life could be supported on such a business would have been a marvel to any one not cognisant of the grand principle on which it was conducted—that of persuading people always to take what they didn't want instead of what they did. When Eleanor entered, the master of the shop was engaged with customers, and she had to wait; not sorry for a seat, as her lassitude and indisposition were creeping over her more and more.

'Paper, ma'am? Yes, ma'am, directly,' was the civil answer she received on application, but that was all, as the paper in question was already in the hands of a stout individual in a voluminous plaid waistcoat, who was studying it with a frowning brow—a short, meek-looking neighbour trying, with some difficulty, to get glimpses of it over his shoulder or under his arm.

'Well!' ejaculated the stout man, presently, taking off his glasses to add solemnity to the observation—'well! If this is not the most rascally case I ever read of in all my days, I never heard of one, Wilkinson, that's all I can say!'

'It does look bad, as far as one can see,' remarked Wilkinson, who certainly could not see much.

'As far as one can see! Why, what would you see?' retorted the other, who had a way peculiar to some gifted speakers, of always repeating the last thing you said, in a contemptuous and injured tone, as a personal affront to themselves. 'Bad, do you call it? It is infamous, that's what it is. Infamous. Such fellows ought to be pilloried, flogged, and hung. Men have been for much less before now. Have you read this article, Mr Scales?'

'That article, sir? I did just glance at it for a moment. Several gentlemen were talking about it just now—shocking indeed. Sky-blue, like the pattern, did you say, miss?' to a dubious-looking maid-of-all-work from a school, who had just obtained a hearing. 'I am exceedingly sorry we are out of that particular shade, but here is a green that is very much admired, and I can strongly recommend, if that will do. Crochet needles, my dear?' to a child whose nose just reached the top of the counter. 'Yes, plenty of crochet needles—no, not bone—steel—steel crochet needles are the only ones ever used now. There is one for you—thank you, my little dear. Your green wool, miss—thank you. Ah! yes, Mr Stubbs, as you say, it will be the ruin of some people, it will.'

'Some people? It will ruin hundreds. It will break more hearts than that rascal has hairs on his head; and they say he is a young fellow, too, and extravagant as a prince. That's how it is, you see! Easy enough to live like princes on other people's money. Why, even you could do as much as that, Wilkinson, hey?'

'I dare say,' assented Wilkinson, mechanically, who had gradually got hold of the paper, and was reading for dear life.

'You dare say! Of course you could; anybody could without a conscience, who had crowds of people only too happy to let him dip his hands into their pockets! I only wish, as I said before, they pilloried 'em; I'd go up to London just to see it. I say,' pulling out a huge watch with some difficulty, 'it is time we were jogging. Come along, Wilkinson, you can finish that by-and-by. I'll take the paper with me, Scales.'



'Certainly, Mr Stubbs, certainly. Perhaps you would not object—I am sure you will not—to let this lady look at it first, sir? She has been waiting some time, and I am sorry to say, it is the only one we have in just now. Thank you,' as he dexterously drew the paper from Wilkinson's tenacious fingers, and laid it before Eleanor. 'Thank you very much. Here is the *Farmers' Friend*, gentlemen; perhaps you have not seen it. A long article, I understand, on some new animal they want to introduce as butcher's meat; just as a little change from beef and mutton, you know. Quite a new idea.'

'A new idea, is it? I should think so,' growled Mr Stubbs, not at all pleased at being kept waiting, even by a lady. 'If folks like new ideas about butcher's meat, I can only say they may eat 'em. I suppose it was a new idea in the Crimea, feeding the Guards on starved baggage-horses. Just ask *them* how they liked the change from beef and mutton. New ideas, indeed!'

'Well, sir, they are doing better out there now,' began Mr Scales, with apologetic meekness.

'Doing better? It is time they were, and that we were too, if you come to that; but with such a precious government as ours, what can you expect? I only know, if I had the management of public affairs for a day—and I know few men better fitted for it—I would have such a clearance made of all those—What's the matter?' for Wilkinson was shaking his elbow; 'you never will let a soul open his lips but yourself. What is it now?'

'Just look there,' said Wilkinson.

Stubbs followed his friend's eyes, and started, as did the bookseller. Eleanor was sitting in a rigid attitude, her eyes fixed on the paper, her face as white as death.

'She has money in that vile bank, and the news is too much for her. A glass of water, Scales, quick! Poor thing, poor thing! Stick the door open, Wilkinson, can't you, instead of standing staring there. I say, ma'am, don't now, pray don't. Be alive with that water, Scales, do. I should say the least taste of brandy wouldn't hurt; but I suppose that won't quite do. Here, ma'am, just you drink a drop, and you'll be better, and then, perhaps, you'll take a more cheerful view of things.'

How much of all this she heard was doubtful; she drank eagerly of the water, and then looked up, with a bewildered

expression, as if just recovering from a stunning blow, but without the fixed stare that had given them such alarm. She tried to thank them, but her lips were unable to form a syllable. Mr Stubbs, confirmed in his first surmise, thought it as well to administer advice and consolation.

‘You are not to run away with the fancy, ma’am, that all is gone for ever. There may be something in the pound when they come to wind up accounts. I beg your pardon for seeming curious, but I hope you have not much to lose?’

She looked at him almost wildly, rose with an effort, and stood supporting herself against the counter.

‘You know, ma’am, it will do you no good to be told what isn’t true. My private opinion is that it is a bad business; but still there may be something for the creditors, and if there’s a spark of honour among ’em, they’ll do their best to lessen the misery they’ve brought on so many. Take you this comfort, ma’am: it is bad to lose your money, but it is worse to lose your character, and have the wretchedness of innocent people at your door. I do believe,’ he muttered, in a lower voice, ‘she has had a turn too much this time; she does not hear a word one says. And to let her go away by herself seems almost inhuman. I say, ma’am, will you see a doctor? Or, have you any friends you could send to? Here is Mr Wilkinson will be most happy, I am sure—hold your tongue, Wilkinson, you know you would. I’d go myself, but you are younger and nimbler than I am. Just say, ma’am, where he is to run, and he’ll be there in less than no time.’

‘Thank you—thank you,’ she said, roused by the emergency, and speaking in a hurried, almost terrified manner, ‘I am quite well now, I am much obliged to you. I require no assistance. May I take this paper?’

‘Take that paper? Well, madam, I can’t say no to a lady; I wanted it rather, I may say, very particular, but if you must have it, you must, I suppose. The more you look at it, the less you’ll like it, I fancy; but that’s your affair, not mine.’

Before this speech was finished, Eleanor had paid for the newspaper, and left the shop, she hardly knew how, but she found herself presently so breathless, she must have been walking unusually fast. The rattle of wheels was close behind, and the carriage that had conveyed her the day of her arrival, drew up by her side—the horse, if possible, rather leaner and dirtier than before—the driver touching his hat

insinuatingly, as if asserting a special claim to her patronage. 'The gentlemen at Mr Scales's told me as you wanted a fly, ma'am. My 'oss in fust-rate condition, ma'am, thanks to you—treat him like a child of my own, ma'am, now.'

She was still so faint and sick, that she was glad to accept the offered conveyance, and ostentatiously sticking his whip in its rest, as a banner of universal humanity, he awaited her orders.

'To the inn—The Merry Angler—as fast as possible.'

'Fast? did you say fast, ma'am?' stretching out his hand for the whip.

'Yes, yes—go on, or I must walk. As fast as you possibly can.'

'Very good, ma'am, then here goes!' Crack went his lash. 'And another time,' he muttered to himself, 'I shall know that when ladies is hextra tender about the 'osses, it's just because they isn't in a hurry—when they *is*, good luck to man and beast!'

With all his thumps and slashes, however, it seemed to Eleanor as if she should never reach her destination. Too stunned to think, she was, as yet, only conscious of suffering, and of longing to be quiet and alone; but this small relief was not to be hers just yet. There were several people standing about the door as she alighted; one man, who was struggling with a rebellious cigar, eyed her rather curiously, and seemed to listen with interest to the eloquent reasons poured forth by the driver, for charging three times as much as he was entitled to.

'It strikes me, cabby, your beast has done his work,' he remarked, moving nearer to the vehicle, and, in spite of her veil, getting a view of Mrs Atterbury's delicate profile as he did so.

'Done his work?' repeated the other, patting his Rosinante's sides, with as much enthusiasm as if he had really intended to give him something to eat some day, 'he knows better than that, don't you, Billy? He has ladies to take his part, he has, and is never to be hit or over-driven, he isn't unless they happen to be in a hurry; and then it don't hurt, because they pays.'

'In a hurry, was she?' observed the stranger, still puffing at his cigar with a perseverance worthy of a better cause.

'I never druv a lady yet as wasn't,' was the answer, 'un-

less somebody else was with 'em, in a hurry too, and then they'll take their time, just out of contrariness. We knows them, don't we, Billy ?'

'I dare say you do, and so do I. I say, friend, if your horse is as fresh as you say, you won't be above another job, I suppose ?'

'No, sir, certainly not.'

'Then don't be out of hail, in case you're wanted. A word to the wise.' And with a significant nod, he turned back to the bar.

Eleanor had noticed nothing of all this, in her haste to reach the shelter of her own apartment, which she had hardly entered, when Mrs Parsons followed her in great excitement.

'Dear heart, ma'am, how poorly you look! You really ought not to have gone out with that cold, indeed you ought not. And you have been and got a paper yourself! Well, now, if that wasn't too bad, after I had been so particular; but it don't matter now—I have good news for you—yes,' for Eleanor started and trembled, 'he is come, he is come, safe and sound, and now your poor dear heart will be easy. I declare I am as glad as if it was a brother of my own!'

'He is here? Why does he not come to me? Where is he?' asked Eleanor, trying to pass.

'No, now, don't you excite yourself, my dear, dear lady; it will do you so much harm. He is just behind me, only I came to prepare you for the surprise. Come in, sir, do, and set her mind at ease.' And drawing back as she spoke, with a beaming face of sympathy and congratulation, she admitted Mr Despard.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### CITY LODGINGS.

THE cry that rose to Eleanor's lips died there unuttered, before the quick, warning glance of her visitor. He closed the door on Mrs Parsons, slipped the bolt, and stood listening a few moments to make sure she was out of hearing, before a word was spoken. When satisfied that all was safe, he turned

to Mrs Atterbury, who stood watching him in motionless terror, and approaching her with the deepest respect, took her hand in his.

‘Forgive my presuming to intrude like this, dear Mrs Atterbury; and still more for employing a little artifice to account for my visit without causing suspicion: I did so by your husband’s desire.’

‘Is he ill?’ she asked abruptly, the difficulty of articulation bringing out the words with a gasp.

‘No; not at all. His health has not suffered as yet—his mental sufferings you may perhaps imagine. I see you know already what I came to tell.’

‘That paper——’ she began, but could not continue. He led her to a chair, and with gentle solicitude relieved her of her bonnet and shawl. He almost longed to see her weep; anything would be better than that ghastly quietness.

‘I am afraid you are ill; it was wrong to leave you here alone, but he meant it for the best. It would have been worse at Wardenstone.’

Eleanor shuddered. ‘I am all in a dream still,’ she murmured, faintly. ‘I do not yet understand, and am almost afraid to ask. Tell me the worst at once—what has happened?’

‘What you already know—Atterbury’s bank has stopped.’

‘But only for a time, is it not?’ Her existence seemed to depend upon the answer.

‘That I dare not say. I am afraid it is a bad business.’

‘But, Mr Despard, if he is ruined, what will become of all those who trusted him?’

‘Hush—well, they must take what there is, of course. Such things will happen, and have happened before.’

‘His private fortune—all his property—will that cover the loss?’

Despard shook his head. ‘Do not ask me more than you are sure you can bear, Mrs Atterbury.’

‘I can bear anything that I ought to know, sir; anything that concerns my husband’s honour. I entreat you to tell me the truth? Are we ruined?’

‘No—I am happy to think *your* fortune is safe, being entirely settled on yourself.’

‘Then the law has no claim on that?’

‘None whatever. This is poor Frederick’s only comfort.’

‘I must see Mr Martock without delay. You came to fetch me, did you not?’

‘I did, if you should be equal to it; if not, to take your commands, and escort you wherever you pleased.’

‘Thank you. Will you arrange for the next train?’

‘Well, if you will excuse me—I think we should go by a later one. We are less likely to be observed.’

‘What does it matter if we are?’

‘It matters more than you are the least aware of. Dear Mrs Atterbury, it is terrible to have to name such things to you at this moment, but for your own and your husband’s sake it is right you should be aware of the truth.’

She leant forward, her hands clenching the elbows of her chair. ‘What is it?’ was all she could say. He bent over her with grave commiseration, and whispered a few words that seemed literally ‘to freeze her young blood.’ Her head dropped on her hands, and her whole frame appeared to collapse and shiver beneath the blow. Despard was obliged to draw back and wait till the first agony was past; every time he attempted to speak, a gesture implored his silence. He flung the windows open, as much for his own comfort as hers, and stood wiping his brow, and watching her with a degree of alarm, that made his relief indescribable, when she again looked up.

‘Thank you for your honesty, Mr Despard,’ she said, in a voice that seemed to have grown many years older; ‘it is right I should know everything, that I may see my duty. It is plain to me now. The more his enemies calumniate and wrong him, the closer his friends must cling. You are one of his oldest and dearest; I am sure you will be true now, to him and me.’

She had risen and held out her hand. He bent his head as he returned its pressure. Perhaps he was glad not to meet her eye, for she felt his hand tremble, and he seemed to find it difficult to frame an answer.

‘Thank you,’ she said again, accepting it as expressed, though unsaid; ‘then now you must guide me as you think best. I am ready to do whatever is right, only do not keep me longer from him than is absolutely necessary. When shall we go?’

‘There is a train at eight,’ said Despard, clearing his throat with an effort; ‘I should recommend our taking that.’

‘Not sooner? Well,’ with a weary sigh, ‘I trust to you

and, meanwhile, I must order you something. You have had no dinner, I am sure.'

'Pray do not think of that,' said he, with unaffected eagerness. 'If you will allow me, I will take a chop in the travellers' room, while you try and get a little rest. Do, to oblige me, if I may presume to ask for an obligation. Remember, you have a great deal before you, and will need all your strength.'

'I shall, and more than my own—but it will be given me. I have no fear about myself: it is only for *him*—with his high spirit, his noble, generous heart—how will he ever bear it?'

It was more than she herself could bear any longer; she hurried into her little bed-room, locking the door behind her. Despard lingered a few moments, till he heard her weeping, and then, with a sigh of relief, went slowly down-stairs. 'She will do now,' he thought, 'and will be all the quieter by-and-by. I must take care these folks suspect nothing.'

To quiet all suspicions at once, he fell into lively chat with Mrs Parsons (still under the belief that he was Mrs Mornay's brother from the Crimea), told her stories and adventures enough to have supplied Mr Russell with a second volume—very much to the satisfaction of the stranger before mentioned, who had quietly drawn near to listen—and wound up by explaining that his sister being rather overcome, they should not start till the evening. She would have a cup of tea presently, and meanwhile was lying down. She had left it to him to settle the bill, though he was well aware no money could make sufficient return for the kindness of Mrs Parsons.

Nothing could sound more reasonable, and their plan was carried out without hindrance. Eleanor, closely veiled, had just taken her place in the railway carriage, and her companion was arranging her goods under the seat, when the stranger from the Merry Angler stepped in, and placed himself opposite. Despard gave such a start on perceiving him, that Eleanor, whose nerves were all on the stretch, had some difficulty in stifling a scream. It was too late to change; the guard closed the door the next minute, and in another they were in motion. Despard, after the first gesture of chagrin, had subsided into moody silence, and nothing occurring to renew her alarm, Mrs Atterbury had almost forgotten it in her sorrowful thoughts, when she found a slip of paper gliding into her hand. With instinctive caution she watched her opportunity, and read unobserved:

‘He followed me from town. We are watched. Take care.’

The feelings of one who has gone from the warm daylight into a dark under-ground labyrinth, and there, with only a fast-wasting candle in his hand, suddenly discovers he has lost his way, might in some degree resemble those of Eleanor Atterbury, thus unexpectedly removed from her own clear world of openness and security, into a region where all seemed stratagem, concealment, and dangers unknown. Happily, her affectionate unselfishness stood her in good stead; she felt everything more for her husband than for herself, and commanded her nerves and kept her senses on the alert for his sake, as she could not have done for her own.

Danger, obloquy, if such were to be his portion, only made her loyal love the more ardent; and every moment appeared an hour, that delayed that in which by look, word, and deed, she could prove her entire devotion and trust. But disappointment was in store for her still. They could not shake off their spy. Despard tried once to change carriages, but finding him about to follow, abandoned the idea. On reaching London he hurried his fair companion into a cab, whispered the address, and was just flattering himself that they were safe, when the driver put his head in to say, ‘We’re followed.’ Despard looked out—a Hansom was in the rear, and every turn they took it took also, with the steadiness of an old hound on the scent. He threw himself back on his seat with a muttered ejaculation of rage. ‘It won’t do,’ he said; ‘Atterbury must not run the risk. I must leave you at the lodgings taken for you, and let him know we are dogged.’

‘Is not Frederick there, then?’ asked Eleanor, feeling as if her last comfort was gone.

‘I sincerely trust not,’ was the reply. ‘If we are watched like this, we shall have to be uncommonly careful what we are about. I don’t like the look of that fellow at all.’

They were driving now through the deserted City streets—themselves an unaccustomed sight to the young bride, which under other circumstances would have interested her strongly. Now, the unwonted shapes of the houses, the ghostly outlines of churches, the glimpses down silent dimly-lighted courts, were all but as fragments of a dreary dream, from which she could not wake. They stopped at last at an archway, the entrance to a small flagged quadrangle. Here Despard jumped out, paid the driver, and was conducting Eleanor in just as the



Hansom appeared at the end of the street. 'Close work,' he muttered, as he strode across the flags to the door of a dingy house, which, in answer to sundry raps, was opened by an elderly woman, her dress fluctuating between slovenliness and finery. On being requested to show Mrs Mornay her apartments, this attractive hostess eyed her from head to foot, stroked her chin thoughtfully, and then taking up a tallow-candle, ushered her up two pair of stairs to a sitting-room opening into a bed-room, far from clean, and stiflingly close with summer heat and smells.

'We had very short notice, ma'am,' she said, in a high, sharp voice, seeing, or fancying she saw, that Mrs Atterbury was not enthusiastic in her admiration of her new quarters; 'it was quite as an accommodation to oblige Mr Martock I contrived to get them ready at all for you. But Mr Martock said they were just the thing, and I've never had any complaints from any of my lodgers, never.'

'Thank you—I have no doubt—it will do very well,' returned poor Eleanor, hardly knowing what she said.

'I am afraid Mrs Mornay is too tired to-night to have an opinion on anything,' put in Despard, as he set down her modest supply of luggage, and began very coolly to light a small lamp that stood on the table. 'Should you object, Miss Craggs, to removing your candle? It rather affects my breathing. Thanks,' as Miss Craggs stepped into the passage; 'we won't detain you, as I know how valuable your time is. This is the best we could get under the circumstances,' he went on, when they were alone, 'and Miss Craggs, though not lovely, is to be trusted—at least, so Martock says. Still, I feel it is a dreary place to leave you in, alone.'

'Never mind that,' said Eleanor, trying not to shudder as she glanced round; 'there will be time enough to think about personal comfort by-and-by. I did hope I should see Frederick to-night. Would it really be unsafe?'

'With that fellow hanging about, it certainly would. I am going now to announce your arrival, and I shall have to look out pretty sharp to make sure I am not followed again. What shall I say to him from you, by way of comfort?'

The tears almost choked her. 'Tell him, that I only wait for his wishes to fulfil them—that all I have is his—that to save his honour I will give up every farthing; and he is not to think for a moment I am afraid of being poor. I am afraid of nothing—nothing—so that his good name be saved. Oh, Mr

Despard! you do not believe that those calumnies can really injure him? Surely, if all we have is given up to the creditors, it must prove that, unfortunate as he is, he is at least an honest man!

‘Quite as honest as most of them, at any rate; but indeed, your generosity is carrying you too far. You are not called upon to make such a sacrifice; and Martock, I am sure, will not hear of it.’

‘If Mr Martock declines to serve me in this matter,’ said Eleanor, firmly, ‘I shall find some other friend who will. No one living has, or can have, a right to interfere. My husband’s honour is my own. I have very little notion how to set about it, but I have quite made up my mind what to do, and to do it at once.’

‘Remember one thing, my dear Mrs Atterbury—it is all you have to live upon. I tell you frankly, the house will never right itself; it is a complete smash—bankruptcy, ruin, everything most distressing. There will be no prospect of his regaining his position; you will have to leave the country, and without means, what will you do?’

‘What will they do whom we have beggared?’ said Eleanor, in a hollow voice. ‘Pray do not argue the point with me: I have not strength to reason yet. I can only just see what is right. It cannot be just to keep back anything, and Frederick will be the first to say so.’

Despard twisted and pulled his long whiskers till they stood out almost on end; turned to the door, stopped short, as if something held him back against his will; and growled at last, in a tone quite unlike his usual manner, ‘It is an abominable business from first to last, and I wish I had never meddled with it.’

‘Sir?’ said Mrs Atterbury, looking at him in astonishment.

‘Well, well—I mean, you ought not, at any rate, to have been kept in ignorance. You ought to have been across the water, and not exposed to all this. It is a disgraceful way of doing things, and if I had had the arranging of it you would both have been safe by this time. It is all that old Martock’s obstinacy, and he has such a grip on poor Fred——’

‘Frederick has confidence in him, has he not?’ asked Eleanor, becoming more and more bewildered.

‘Confidence of course he must have in a fellow who knows more of his affairs than he does himself: *cela va sans dire*—

but that does not prevent his thinking him——What is it ?' for Eleanor's face had changed suddenly, and she made a start forwards. Even as he asked the question, he turned to see, and found Mr Martock at his elbow ; but how long he had been there, or by what means he had entered unobserved, it was impossible to divine. The first start of annoyance and confusion suppressed, Despard looked keenly into the lawyer's face, who, even while shaking hands with Eleanor, returned the look with interest. She, poor woman, too full of her grief and anxiety to have room for personal feeling, was really glad he was come, and showed it by her greeting, unconscious of the glances that were crossing each other like sword-blades between her rival counsellors.

'It was very good of you to come to me at once, Mr Martock. Now I can tell you everything before I sleep : this is such comfort ! Have you just left him ?'

'No, I have not seen him for some hours ; I have been too much engaged. I am glad to find I do not intrude by this late visit. Mr Despard looks rather surprised to see me.'

'Surprised ? Of course I was, to find you creeping into the room like a cat, my dear fellow ; but now I think of it, the surprise would have been if you had stayed away. I am much obliged to you, for my part ; you have saved me a world of trouble, and, perhaps, a great many mistakes. I will leave you and Mrs Atterbury to your consultations, while I go to set my friend's mind at ease.'

Eleanor followed him to the door, not only to express her sense of his friendly services, but to remind him that she was in his debt. He promised to settle accounts with her the next day, and took his leave—whistling, as he went down-stairs, in a manner that was his wont when his mind was made up to something dangerous.

'Dog *me*, do you ? Send a spy to watch my movements, and report them ? That's your little game, is it, my worthy friend ? Then if I don't know a trick worth two o' that I'll give you leave to do it again !'

## CHAPTER X.

## DIVIDED COUNSELS.

‘Now, my dear madam,’ said Mr Martock, when he was left alone with his client, ‘did I understand that you wished to tell me something immediately?’

‘I should have said I wished you to tell *me*,’ she replied, ‘what I ought to do. Should I write to Sir John Pierpoint? Is there any one I ought to see, or anywhere I ought to go, to reassure people’s minds that they are going to be fairly dealt with?’

‘Suppose we sit down, Mrs Atterbury, and discuss the matter quietly.’ He took a seat at the table, opposite to hers; laid some papers down before him, on which he rested his elbow, and looked her intently in the face.

‘You ask my advice, Mrs Atterbury, in this painful turn of circumstances. You will, therefore, permit me to use openness in giving it.’

‘If you only will,’ said Eleanor, innocently. He made a slight inclination of the head, the irony whereof she could not see.

‘Two courses are open to you, Mrs Atterbury, as I pointed out to your husband this morning. It is for me to lay them before you; but you only can decide which you ought to take. One is, to put yourself at once under the protection of your own friends—of Sir John Pierpoint, if you think proper, or any other in whom you have confidence. They will take care that your rights are guarded, and that you are spared all unnecessary pain and annoyance. In all probability, you would be advised to go abroad for a time, till affairs were more settled, and the whole thing blown over. This would, I am sure, meet with your husband’s approval, as relieving him of all anxiety about your comfort under the circumstances.’

‘And the other?’ asked Eleanor, with difficulty repressing her impatience.

‘The other is more than any one could presume to recommend. It is simply to set aside every consideration but that of assisting Mr Atterbury.’

‘In which case what should I do?’

‘When I know which you mean to adopt, I can explain; but not before.’

‘Can I have any object on earth now but that of assisting him?’

‘I can imagine your feeling so at this moment; but, Mrs Atterbury, it will require a good deal of self-denial and perseverance—a good deal of magnanimity and courage, to carry out what you will have to undertake. More, I may venture to say, than you have any idea of.’

She pressed her hands together, and sat silently looking on the floor before answering.

‘I have thought it all over—I have, indeed. I am not afraid of failing; I trust strength will be given me to do what I ought. My only wish—no, not wish, it is no time for wishes—my fixed determination is to stand by Frederick against the world, and to give up everything I have for his sake: and when I say this, Mr Martock,’ she continued, with mournful earnestness, ‘I am not talking as if I did not realize what it means. I know well how hard my father and grandfather worked all their lives, for the fortune they left to me, and it is no small matter to sacrifice it all at one blow: but I know, too, what they would have expected from me—what they would have done themselves, where honour and integrity were at stake. So now, if my simple word has any weight with you, you may advise me without scruple, as having no interest on earth but Frederick’s safety and happiness.’

‘That is sufficient, Mrs Atterbury; I can now speak plainly. If you really are so resolved, you must put yourself and your affairs for the present unreservedly into my hands.’

‘We are in them already,’ said she, with a gentle smile.

‘Yes—but you must understand this, for it is most important. No other adviser, whatever, must be consulted; no one must even know where you are. You must put up with your present concealment till I give you notice.’

‘I shall see Frederick?’ said she, trembling.

‘If safe for you both, certainly; but remember, you are surrounded by enemies, and if either of you were recognized, I would not answer for the consequences.’

‘Could they do anything to me?’

‘Not personally—but if it were once discovered that you were in town, they would never lose sight of you again till they had, through you, found *him*, and if, in the present state of things, he *were* found, and exposed to public shame and execration—’

Her gesture of agony stopped him. It was not till after a short interval had elapsed, that she could reply, almost in a whisper, ‘It would kill us both.’

'I think it would.' There was another silence ; Eleanor's face was hidden in her hands.

'We were watched to this very door,' she said, at last, with a sudden start of recollection, 'by a person Mr Despard called a spy. What will be the consequences, do you think ?'

'Nothing serious, I hope ; nothing serious. It shall be looked to, however ; and shows how cautious we ought to be. You see, madam,' he went on, after a little consideration, 'your whole fortune, thrown into the gulf of the bank's failure, might as well be thrown into the sea, for the good it would do. It would sound very devoted and generous on your part, but would not buy his safety for an hour. There are two classes of persons whom he has great cause to dread : his private creditors, to whom he is largely indebted—and those of the bank, who have, unfortunately, too strong grounds for threatening a criminal prosecution. Yes, Mrs Atterbury, I know all you are going to say, and it is a very distressing thing, but we have no time to regret or be indignant about it now—such is the *fact*. By a large timely pecuniary sacrifice, judiciously managed, I think you might secure your husband from both these pressing dangers, and then he might retire with you abroad, where the remnant of your property would be sufficient for respectability and comfort : display you would not wish for. But to be successful, such a negotiation must be begun at once, and conducted in secrecy. The bitterness of the public feeling increases every hour ; the report has been spread that you are both abroad ; this we have helped to circulate, as it assists our designs, but to one or two, interested in Atterbury's detention, it is privately known that he is in town ; and these parties, if not satisfied, may betray him to others. There is a vague hope that you will do something, and these hopes, properly encouraged, will keep people quiet for a little while, and give us time for further arrangements. Do I make myself intelligible ?'

Eleanor made a sign of assent.

'And you decide to place these arrangements in my hands ?'

'I have no alternative, sir : I can only leave it to you who understand how they should be carried out. All I have to say is, what I said before ; I am ready to give up everything—to pay as far as my utmost means extend, though the rest of my life be spent in hard work. I can do no more, and I would do no less. Only save his name, and give him a hope for the future. I suppose there is nothing I can do to-night ?'

‘Nothing,’ he said, rising, ‘unless it be to take the rest you evidently require. I shall wait upon you to-morrow as early as possible. Remember, your health is of great importance just now; it is your duty to take care of it for the sake of others, if not for your own.’

‘Thank you,’ she replied, with a weary sigh, ‘I will do my best.’

What that ‘best’ would have been had she been left to herself it would be difficult to say. Happily, perhaps, she was not allowed much choice in the matter. The door had scarcely closed on Mr Martock before Miss Craggs’s heavy foot was on the stairs, and entering, brass candlestick in hand, she stood erect before her lodger.

‘If you please, ma’am, do you expect any more gentlemen to-night?’

‘No—I believe not,’ said Mrs Atterbury, rousing herself from the dejected attitude into which she had sunk.

‘Then, I suppose, ma’am, you don’t wish to keep people up any longer, and I may take away the lamp. We are not accustomed to such hours as these. Your bed is made, and here is your candle.’

There was no resisting so imperious a mandate, and Eleanor yielded, with a gentleness that so far mollified her landlady as to make her mutter something apologetic, and even propose assisting her to unpack. This being civilly declined, she withdrew, wishing her good night in a softened tone, and hoping she would sleep comfortably, she was sure. It was more than the unhappy young lady dared to hope, but she remembered her promise. Powerful as the temptation was to give way to a paroxysm of grief and despair, she resisted it steadfastly, and prayed till she fell asleep—too absorbed, too sad, and perhaps too tired and ill, to feel the discomforts of her lodging, or criticise the domestic cleanliness of Miss Craggs. She rose early, oppressed with stifling heat, and longing for the fresh air no open window could give her; vexed to find herself coughing, and aching in every limb, but resolved that no bodily infirmity should disable her from her necessary work. The breakfast sent up, with a protocol from Miss Craggs, to the effect that it was usual for her lodgers to provide themselves with all they required—that she didn’t keep a boarding-house, and wouldn’t to please anybody—but that, as Mr Martock’s friend, she had accommodated her for once—had little to tempt her appetite;

but parching thirst made hay tea and London milk taste like nectar, and her return message was so courteously grateful, Miss Craggs began to wonder, involuntarily, what she would like for dinner. She had almost begun to ascend the stairs to ask the question in person, when her mood was changed by the arrival of Mr Despard, to whom, from the first, she had taken a strong dislike, and, returning very short answers to his inquiries after her lodger, she left him to announce himself, slamming the door of her sitting-room in his face without ceremony.

Fortunately for him, his reception on the second floor was of a gentler nature, for his errand required a little encouragement. It was no less than, after Mrs Atterbury had settled with him for the expenses of her journey, to ask her for three hundred pounds. It took her by surprise, especially as he declined to explain further than that it was to be employed on her husband's service. Did Frederick know of it? No, he had found it too late overnight to visit him, and had been too busy about his affairs that morning. He did not in the least wonder at Mrs Atterbury's hesitation; he had no guarantee to offer but his honour, and if she thought that worth trusting to, he would do his best to justify the trust: if not, he had no more to say, but this—that the opportunity of doing the service was theirs now, was slipping away every moment, and might never return. And having said so much, he waited patiently for her decision, confident from the first what that decision would be.

'Listen,' said Eleanor, after a short and evidently painful interval of reflection, 'it is not that I would not trust you, my husband's intimate friend, with twice the amount, if you required it, under other circumstances; but it is right you should know, and he also, that I have already taken upon myself liabilities to so large an amount, I hardly know what to call my own, and what I am entitled to dispose of.'

'I knew you would be doing this,' was his answer; 'and therefore I urge the request. It will be of inestimable service to him to-day; to-morrow it may, I think it *will*, be too late. Nay, unless given now, it may be scarcely worth giving at all.'

'I must believe you,' she said, after another pause; 'I dare not refuse. I hope I am doing right. I am so helpless and ignorant in these matters. There, sir'—she had taken her cheque-book out of her dressing-case, and filled it up to



the amount required. 'If he disapproves what I have done, he must come and tell me his wishes himself. Oh, if he only would!'

'I promise you this,' said Despard, as he folded up the cheque, 'if he does not approve what I propose to do, I will bring you this back again. And what is more, if you are really so distressed at not seeing him, he shall run the risk, we won't stop for Martock's opinion; he *shall* come to you, and there's an end of it.'

'Not for the world!' said she, eagerly, 'while there is any risk. It was weak of me to mention it. I am content to wait. Go, do what you have to do, and bring me word how he is. Everything else is of comparatively little consequence.'

'You forgive me, Mrs Atterbury?'

'For what?'

'For more than I can explain—for taking this—perhaps for doing with it what you might not have wished. I shall be easier with your pardon.'

She held out her hand with a sad smile, but said nothing; her heart was too heavy. He pressed the hand to his lips with unusual warmth, and hurried away.

When Mr Martock came with his papers an hour or two later, she told him what she had done. He looked very serious, and almost angry. Of course, Mrs Atterbury had a right to do as she pleased, but this sort of thing was out of the question, if she really meant to serve her husband. He was sorry to say it, but it was a painful fact, that Mr Despard had led Mr Atterbury into a thousand foolish extravagances, and he feared they had both entangled themselves in certain racing and gambling transactions, which would soon swallow up her fortune, if she meddled with them. Let her once be supposed willing to defray debts of honour, and she would be drained in no time. He should let Mr Despard into a piece of his mind on the first opportunity.

The opportunity was not long withheld: the two met in Eleanor's apartment that evening. Mr Martock, who was first to arrive, was giving his fair client an account of the scenes he had been going through, the exertions he had been making during the day, when her other counsellor came in. His face was rather flushed, and his manner, usually so full of courteous respect for Mrs Atterbury, had a degree of

freedom and jocularity in it that made her very thankful for Mr Martock's presence. She could not help thinking he was rather excited by wine ; as perhaps he was, for he talked of the bank, and the 'smash,' and the consternation and rage of the public, as if it was all an excellent joke—carried a little too far perhaps, but irresistibly comical. The graver and more annoyed his hearers looked, the more he roared with laughter ; every mention of Frederick's name seemed to tickle him with a facetiousness he could not conceal, and he had, at last, to walk to the window, and there give way to the mirth that made the tears run down his cheeks, protesting all the while that old Martock would be the death of him.

'Is this a man to be trusted, do you think ?' asked Mr Martock in a low voice ; not so low, however, but that Despard caught the words.

'Trusted ? I think so, indeed, my old boy ! and if you like, we'll let Mrs Atterbury behind the scenes, and she shall decide for herself which of us will be her safest friend—or her sharpest, which comes to the same thing. Shall we, old fellow ?'

'When you are in a fit state to discuss these matters, it will be time enough to go into them. Meanwhile, I believe Mrs Atterbury's own good sense will be her safeguard against such applications as you made to her this morning. We see the result, and are satisfied.'

'That is very clever of you, and must be a great ease to your minds. You see the result, do you ? Well, perhaps you do. I *am* a little cheerful perhaps, and so would you be, my esteemed and venerable friend, if you had done the good day's work I have. I have only one little hint to give you—sharp hand as you are, you have lost the trick !'

Mr Martock's impassive features changed a little, and his hand stopped for a minute, in the act of folding up his papers. He glanced at Eleanor, whose deep blush betrayed her resentment at such behaviour, and stepped promptly between her and Despard. 'Come,' he said, touching his arm in a conciliatory manner, 'we need not trouble Mrs Atterbury any longer. If you are going my way we can walk together.'

'Westward, ho ? with all my heart ; most worshipful sir ; I am at your service, whenever you please. He won't trust us, Mrs Atterbury ; not for a moment. He thinks once is

enough, and no one is to have the managing of your affairs but himself henceforth. He will think differently by this time to-morrow—you may take my word for *that*.'

'There, that will do ; come,' persisted Mr Martock, coaxing him to the door, with another furtive glance at Eleanor's face, as she stood with her hand on the table, regarding them both in indignant silence. It seemed as if her look and attitude had some effect on Despard himself, for he checked a laugh that was bursting from his lips, and with a bow, half apologetic, and not devoid of respect, suffered himself to be drawn out of the room. Nothing, however, would induce him to go out of the house. His throat was as dry as sand, and his legs were tired ; no wonder, considering all he had done. No, he wouldn't go to a tavern—he would stay and see what Miss Craggs, amiable creature ! would give them there. She had a snug little parlour, he knew, and to please Mr Martock, would lend it them for an hour. He was so doggedly obstinate on the matter that his friend, raging inwardly, had to yield : Miss Craggs was summoned, and after some demur, her reluctance by no means diminished by Mr Despard's manner, consented to lend her parlour, and accommodate them with brandy-and-water. Whether anything had previously excited her suspicions, or whether Mr Martock's unusual anxiety put her on the alert, we cannot exactly say, but the consent was given with an inward reservation, that she should hear all that passed ; and having her own private ways and means of so doing, her promise was faithfully kept.

An hour later, they left the house, and she watched them as they crossed the court-yard, and disappeared through the archway, before she went up-stairs to visit her lodger. She found her lying on her bed, exhausted with coughing, and half-blind with tears. Miss Cragg's stern face grew sterner as she looked, and her voice sounded more rasping than ever.

'Shall I send you up some tea, ma'am ! I suppose you wish me to provide for you, as you are not equal to do it for yourself.'

'Thank you ; I am sorry to give you the trouble,' said Eleanor, rousing herself to answer civilly.

'No trouble that I mind, ma'am, if you are not well. Now look here—haven't you a medical man of your own that you could send to ?'

'No, thank you. It is not necessary.'

‘Humph! That’s as people think. But you would like to see some of your friends, perhaps. I could find you a messenger if you want to send to Sir John—I forget what name you said, ma’am.’

‘Pierpoint—thank you—not at present,’ returned Eleanor.

‘Humph!’ ejaculated Miss Craggs again, with more satisfaction than before, for she had ascertained one thing at least that she wanted to know. ‘Did I understand you to say, ma’am,’ raising her voice, as Eleanor’s heavy eyelids closed, ‘that you should require these lodgings very long?’

Mrs Atterbury half-raised herself with a convulsive start. ‘I hope not—it depends on—on business—and on my husband’s arrangements’——

‘Ah! I see,’ and Miss Craggs glanced at Eleanor’s left hand, and cleared her throat significantly. ‘Then, if Mr Mornay comes to join you here, you will want a dressing-room, I suppose?’

There was no answer; the young wife sank back, and turned away her face. Miss Craggs moved to the door, but stopped to observe, ‘Wouldn’t a little fresh air do you good, ma’am, this warm evening? I could put my bonnet on, if you pleased, and take care of you, if you are afraid to go alone.’

‘I wish to be alone, thank you,’ was all the reply given, as if the speaker scarcely understood the question. Miss Craggs stood one moment looking at her as she lay, and then withdrew without further comment. Her first step was to hasten to her room, and examine an old book in red binding that lay in a corner by her tea-caddy. The result proving unsatisfactory, she called to her maid to run over to Mr White’s the bookseller’s, and ask for the loan of Boyle’s Court Guide for a few minutes. It was brought and studied, a direction copied, and the book sent back with thanks.

‘Sir John Pierpoint, —— Place. That is one point ascertained; and now, gentlemen, you had better mind what you are about.’

## CHAPTER XI.

## CONVALESCENCE.

THE strength of a good constitution, aided by the tenderest care and nursing, enabled Anne Clavering to shake off her malady sooner than had at first been expected. All that love and watchfulness could do to ease and sooth her hours of suffering, she received from those about her, and was sensible of and grateful for it before she had power to tell them so. The illness in itself was salutary; it gave her the rest she needed, and in the attendant weakness, the first poignancy of regret grew weaker too; gentle thoughts of those to whom she was so dear, brought hopes for the future with them, and when health began to return, she could bear to think of life and its duties, not as offering the possibility of happiness for herself, but with the prospect of giving some to them. That she could ever be what she had been—ever hope, enjoy, or love again as she had before, was out of the question—but while she had Uncle Rupert and Edward, those two faces she had found hovering over her at all hours, looking as if they lived only in the light of hers, it was equally out of the question that she should die of a broken heart. For them she could, she would exert herself, would try to forget, to take an interest in every-day matters; to be cheerful, patient, and strong-minded; and when her hour of rest really came, it would be all the sweeter that she had not forfeited her right to sympathy by selfish neglect of others.

These were wholesome resolutions, and helped much to accelerate her recovery. In carrying them out she had one great assistance, and this was the society of Uncle Rupert's new acquaintance, old Mrs Sydney; who, directly she heard Mr Clavering's niece was seriously ill, without any female friend but her nurse, at her grandson's urgent entreaty, removed with him into Westminster, and spent all the time she could spare from Arthur, by the bedside of Anne. To the motherless girl, in her weakened and depressed state, these visits became exceedingly precious. Not that Mrs Sydney was remarkably clever—quite the contrary—or that she was a model old lady, such as no eye beholds without

reverence ; she was as simple, homely, matter-of-fact, as ever a quiet woman could be ; but she had one of those loving natures under whose wing a bruised spirit can nestle, secure of sympathy and tenderness, even if not of full appreciation. Her kind old heart yearned over Anne as if she had been a granddaughter of her own ; and her good-tempered simplicity making it impossible for Nurse Moyle's jealous affection to be wounded, she became free of the sick chamber, and one of the invalid's greatest comforts.

Of the principal cause of Anne's illness she knew nothing ; neither did Anne, after she had once asked Edward whether the marriage had taken place, allude to the subject again. The wound was apparently healed ; she tried to appear as if it really was so, and all but Edward were easy about her. He, who knew her best, was the one whom it was hardest to satisfy, but at the same time who was least obtrusive in his anxiety ; and if Anne's cheerfulness deceived all but Wilton, Wilton's private opinion was discovered by none but Anne.

Arthur Sydney's friendship was, in its way, as great a resource to uncle and nephew at this time as his grandmother's. All his sufferings and helplessness were insufficient to depress his joyous temper ; he bore the tortures of daily martyrdom as if they were part of his drill, and had a joke on his lip when tears of anguish were in his eyes. They were often together, and every day felt so unwilling to part, that it became at last a serious matter of discussion whether it would be possible for the Sydney's to take a house near Lawleigh, instead of returning to the north. Mrs Sydney feared the cold of her own home for Arthur's delicate frame, and like many persons who have lived long without any change at all, now that she had once broken her routine, did not greatly care how much she broke it further. Anne was now so far advanced in convalescence that her uncle could leave her without anxiety ; and as it was urgently imperative that he should go and arrange matters at home as soon as possible, it was agreed that he should make all necessary inquiries.

The close summer heat was trying them all, and the feeling was general, that the sooner the two patients were in the country the better : Edward, who would be the greatest loser by the move, being the most earnest in recommending it. Uncle Rupert, therefore, went down to Lawleigh, and

was very busy there for a fortnight or more—too busy, happily for him, to have much time for regret; and finding his best consolation for the sight of his brother's vacant chair in doing everything that they had once planned should be done when the fortune was made for which he had toiled so long. He was so occupied from morning till night with the various matters he had set on foot, that it was only at intervals he had leisure to look at the papers, and then only at the news of the war. And thus it happened that he returned to town a few days after Atterbury's failure, without having seen or noticed it at all.

All London that was sufficiently unfashionable or parliamentary to be still in town, was talking of it when he arrived. Such a blow on men's belief in respectability had not fallen for years. The high character borne by the late Mr Atterbury, and the popular attractions of his son, made it at first appear too monstrous to be true, that the one had died, and the other been living all this time in the depths of insolvency and ruin. The first solution of the failure was that a sudden pressure had come on the house, from which it would recover with honour; but rumours of a very sinister nature followed so thickly, the panic among creditors and depositors became fearful and threatening. Rupert Clavering heard enough, while calling at his own banker's on his way home, to make him shrink from facing Anne, until he had ascertained from other quarters whether she knew it already. Finding Edward too busy to be disturbed, he called at Mrs Sydney's lodgings, and found Arthur on the sofa, talking eagerly with a young man of about his own age.

'Mr Clavering, I am so glad you are come back! Come in. This is an old school-fellow and chum, whom you may have heard me speak of—Tommy Compton. Tommy, I told you how good Mr Clavering was to me when I landed. I never shall forget the taste of that porter. I have been longing for it ever since I left Scutari, and the unfeeling wretches always told me it would be my death, and drank it themselves. Don't run away, Tom; I want you to know each other.'

Compton, though privately considering the introduction a bore, responded civilly, criticising Uncle Rupert's dress the while. 'From India, sir, I suppose, or the Crimea?'

'Overland from Australia—magnificent journey!' said

Uncle Rupert. 'You young men do not know what you lose by staying at home in your clubs.'

'Nor what they gain by going abroad, eh?' put in Arthur, writhing while he smiled. 'Well, sir, how have you been getting on at Lawleigh?'

Mr Clavering answered rather absently; his head was too full of the news he had heard to dwell on anything else, and he had only to name it to set the others talking. Compton was the most excited of the three. He knew the parties—had known Fred Atterbury for ages—ten months at least; the most extravagant fellow, but with such taste! Rather too conceited and bumptious—thought nobody had a right to an opinion but himself—but he had such a terrier! 'I was at his wedding only the other day, when everybody thought him one of the richest and the luckiest—no, I can't say the happiest, exactly, for he had a way of not seeming to care much, even for his pretty wife. And of all good-natured, pleasant girls to ride or dance with, Miss Ormonde was the pleasantest. Ah! but Fred was wide awake, and he cared more than we supposed, for she has a nice little fortune of her own, which will be very convenient just now.'

'It seems no one knows where they are,' said Mr Clavering.

'No; they were last seen at Wardenstone, but they went away the day before the smash, leaving their servants and luggage at the hotel, and saying they should be back in a day or two. Where they went nobody knows, but it is generally believed they are abroad. Jack Despard thinks they are, and he is as likely to be right as most people; in which case, the creditors may whistle. Poor old Pierpoint takes it very much to heart.'

'Who is he?' asked Sydney.

'He was Mrs Atterbury's guardian. She married from his house, and he thought he had done a very clever job in making up the match, for, of all things, he likes a fellow to have lots of money handy.'

'Then you are a special favourite, Tom, I presume?'

'Well, you see it is only good-natured to look after him a bit, now he has come up to town all by himself, and has the gout into the bargain; so I go and listen to his stories, and give him a little advice occasionally, which he is very glad of. He is in a way with Mrs Atterbury for not writing. Poor soul! she cannot have much that is pleasant to tell.



Their newly-furnished house, and the carriage just built for her, and his horses—everything has been seized. He was over head and ears in debt to everybody. Things are coming out every day that nobody dreamed of. I heard an ugly story yesterday, but I shut up the fellow who told it, so I must not tell it myself. I can't believe he is so bad as they make him out.'

'I can,' said Uncle Rupert.

Arthur looked round anxiously. 'Oh, I hope you have not lost by this business?'

'Lost? No, my dear boy; on the contrary, I rather hope we shall be the better for it in the end.'

'Then you are uncommonly lucky,' said Compton; 'I am afraid there are few besides the lawyers who will say as much. It really is a horrid shame, when one comes to think of it; but why you should be so prejudiced against him, Mr Clavering—'

'I am not prejudiced, Sir; I am too old to judge from prejudice.'

'Then what makes you think so ill of Fred Atterbury?'

'I know he acted like a heartless scoundrel in one instance, so I can believe he would do it in another.'

'Hard words, sir, when a fellow is down.'

'Very. And if he were down for misfortune only, I might keep them back: but he was bankrupt in honour before he was in purse; and I can only heartily pity the unfortunate young woman who has the misery of being his wife.'

'She might have done better, certainly,' said Compton, with a gentle sigh; 'but no one had a chance in anything against Fred Atterbury. Well, Arthur, I must be off. You are sure that horse would not suit you?'

'Quite, thank you, old fellow,' was the cheerful answer, and the young man took his leave. 'That is a good-natured fellow, Mr Clavering,' when Rupert was beginning to regret having driven away his friend, 'very good-natured, but he is not the one to whom I would tell what I am going to tell *you*. This is a disastrous business for us; my poor granny's little fortune is gone.'

'You don't mean that, Sydney? Oh, my dear boy!'

'Ay, but I do; it was all there, and had been for years; she and my dear mother used to think nothing equal to Atterbury's, since they dined once with the old gentleman. We

hear there is very little chance of a dividend. A nice thing to think of, isn't it, when one can do nothing to help a dear old soul like that, so generous, she only just kept out of debt, and yet never laid out a farthing that she could help upon herself. I say, Mr Clavering, you talk of the Russians—I never felt downright mad with them but once or twice, when they were savage, and never anything like what I feel now, when I see her crying her old eyes out, and can do nothing but lie here and rage. Thank you, Mr Clavering, thank you. I know how good you are—as Uncle Rupert, half choked, began murmuring his sympathy—and you will give us your best advice ; you will help her to settle things a bit, as I can't. She is gone now to her lawyer, and between them we shall soon know how many straws a day she will have to live on. There is my pay, and I suppose I shall get something for my broken bones, and she has about forty pounds a year in railway shares, and I believe that is all. No pleasant country-house near Lawleigh this time.'

Mr Clavering made but little reply ; he pressed the young man's hand kindly, and repeated his expressions of sympathy, but seemed unusually anxious to be gone, and Arthur Sydney could not but observe how carefully he had refrained from the slightest offer of service. 'It is just as well,' he thought ; 'we do not want to be beholden to anybody, and he knows it. I am glad he said nothing about it—very glad. And yet he was just the kind of generous old fellow, who, one would have supposed, would have rushed into the other extreme. I am very glad he didn't !'

He was scarcely just in this self-gratulation : his friend's silence arose from anything but indifference, or slackness of good will : had he stood alone in the world, he would have yielded to the impulse that urged him, at the first moment, to liberal offers of aid. But one thought outweighed all others now, and that was his niece Anne. How was she bearing this ? What would she have him to do ? Till his mind was satisfied on this point, he could speak on no other ; and yet his hand faltered on the lock of his own door, as if he would, even then, have delayed the meeting. As he entered, she came out of the inner room, and the flush of pleasure that shot into her face gave it a brighter look than he had seen there yet. With a quick gesture of warning she closed the bedroom door behind her, and then hurried to receive his greeting.

'Oh, uncle, I have been longing for you to come back ! What a blessing that you are in England !'

'That means, that you want me to do something, does it not, my dear ?' said he, putting his hat on the table, and wiping his forehead.

'It means that I have something to say, which I could not have told you by letters. Speak low ; Mrs Sydney is lying down in the next room.'

'Ah ! then you know——'

'Yes, and so do you. Uncle ! do not look as if you pitied me. Rather feel with me that we owe him a debt of gratitude. He spared me *this*, at least—the name of Clavering is not coupled with dishonour !'

Uncle Rupert looked anxiously into those indignant eyes, and fearing the risk of excitement, would have spoken of something else, but for this she was too impatient.

'No,' she said, answering the thought his face expressed too plainly, 'you are mistaken, Uncle Rupert ; this is not hurting me ; on the contrary, it has given me new strength. I have something now to live for besides your indulgent love. Uncle, when I heard it first, I could have died with grief, that he was suffering, and I could do nothing to comfort him : but since I have learned the truth—seen *her* tears—read of all the wrong, the misery, the disgrace——' She hid her face on his shoulder for a moment before she could go on. 'Oh ! what must his wife be, to bear it, and live !'

'She will probably never know quite the worst, my dear ; at least, if he can keep it from her. They have escaped abroad, and on her fortune they can still enjoy every comfort—if enjoyment be possible with such a conscience. At any rate, we need not waste pity on *them*. We have to think of the innocent people he has plundered. That fine lad Arthur—I have just left him—he is sadly cut up about his poor grandmother. I was going to ask you——'

'What I was burning to say to *you*, uncle ! I am sure of it ; I knew you would. You will do it—you will make them consent—you will give me this small consolation, that I may help, by love and tenderness, to make up to them what *he* took away. Oh, uncle, was I wrong in feeling glad you were in England ? No one else would read my heart so well !'

Rupert Clavering put his arm round her waist, and drew her down by his side on the sofa. 'Let us be quite sure

what we are about, my dear. It won't do to strike into a new country without taking the bearings. Do you clearly see what you are undertaking, supposing we prevail on them to join their little means with ours, and let you keep house for all? Can you stand the fatigue of attending on an old lady, and a young man suffering all that poor Arthur does? Remember, we have known them but a short time, and they may have relations you will not like, and ways that may put you out, and little tempers—the best have such things, you know. And it will be shabby work to turn back when we have once begun, Anne, my dear.'

'Very shabby: we'll none of it, uncle! If their relations are odious, we will put up with them; if their ways are troublesome, we will accommodate ourselves to them; if their tempers are bad, we will improve them by the example of our own! Anything, so that I may at least be able to feel I have done something to roll away that shame!'

'You are my own brave girl,' said he, kissing her glowing cheek; and the matter, as far as they were concerned, was settled then and there. The next step was to convert their friends to their way of thinking, and Anne, hearing Mrs Sydney moving, went and coaxed her in, notwithstanding her red eyes, and as she sat between the uncle and niece, the subject was tenderly broached, with a general offer of service. She was thankful for their sympathy, but she did not see what any one could do for her. She had written to her married niece, who was a good manager, and understood business, and she would advise her, no doubt. If it were not for Arthur, she would not so much mind, as she couldn't well expect to be very long a trouble to anybody—but to be a burden on Arthur—Ah, it was just of Arthur Uncle Rupert wanted to speak. It was of the greatest consequence that for the next year or two he had every care and comfort—indeed, what would be luxuries to other people, might be necessities of life to him—and then there would be a chance of his being comparatively strong again by-and-by. He had set his heart on having him at Lawleigh at once: never was such air for bracing a shattered constitution! and if it suited him, why should they not hit out some plan by which they might all live together—at any rate, till they grew tired of each other? Anne was quite beyond any man's government, and the Captain would not be the worse for having an old comrade to smoke with—and perhaps he

could put him in the way of making a little money—old Australians were apt to think themselves rather knowing in those matters. However, she was not to hurry herself, or be nervous, but think it over quietly, and hear what Arthur would say, and then it would go hard with them all if they did not contrive to turn all this robbery into a great gain to themselves.

The Sydneys felt the kindness as deeply as the wrong. It took them a little time to decide; they shrank from the idea of incurring obligations they could not repay; but Anne's influence over the old lady was growing sufficiently despotic to make it pretty clear what the extent of her control would be; and her arguments and persuasions were very hard to resist—indeed, never were resisted till Mrs Sydney had got out of her reach. The real truth was, both grandmother and grandson felt so strongly inclined towards the proposal, it made them the more scrupulous in yielding; and the matter was still undecided, when Arthur received the following letter from one of his relatives, the married niece to whom Mrs Sydney had written :

July, 1855.

'MY DEAR ARTHUR,—

'I have been so dreadfully unnerved by this cruel event, that I am not equal to writing at present to my poor dear aunt. Every expression of kindest love and sympathy (in which my dear girls join) I must leave you to convey to her; and I feel convinced, her own sense of what is right will teach her to bear the trial with patience and resignation. I wish it were in my power to help her; you know the warmth of my heart, and were I but rich it would be the sweetest satisfaction I could enjoy, to open my doors to you both, and share my *last crust* with you! But I have been robbed too, shamefully robbed, by these villains—robbed of a sum which I had only been induced to deposit in that vile bank because my poor aunt thought so highly of it, and the interest was good. It was the fruit of *much self-denial*, dear Arthur, for a mother in my place must deny herself *often* for the sake of her children; and I had hoped to bring my two eldest girls up to London next year to enjoy a few of those advantages which *others* enjoy *who have not half their claims to notice*. Every farthing is gone, and I must contrive, and save, and pare down our expenses, to

keep the youngest at school, and live as it is necessary we should. It is *perfectly atrocious* that such people are allowed to escape! I am told this Mr Atterbury's wife has a large fortune, and that they have gone off to revel in their *ill-gotten gains* abroad. If there was any justice in the world, they would be brought back, and made to pay their debts, if they swept the streets afterwards. It is shameful! However, I, for one, forgive them, and hope they may live to repent.

'Now about my poor dear aunt's future prospects. I do not mind telling *you*, that she has been very much imposed upon in her household and village, by a parcel of lazy, designing people, who thrive on her easy good nature. I have warned her of it over and over again. There is nothing hurts people like giving them money. I make a principle of *never doing it*, though it costs me a pang. She has always lived up to her income, and has nothing to show for it; therefore she must now practise a rigid economy, which it is difficult to do in England. There are many quiet places abroad, where boarders are taken in on very moderate terms; and her tastes being simple, she would, I know, be easily satisfied. The society, too, would be a little recreation, without additional expense. I leave it to you to persuade her into making up her mind to what really appears the very best thing she could do. For yourself, my dear Arthur, you know how proud we are of your gallantry, and we should count it a privilege to bind up your glorious wounds; but under our peculiar circumstances, it would be impossible to bestow the care and attention upon you that you require, and I must reserve the pleasure—I may say, *honour*—of a visit from my hero cousin till you are a little stronger. Meanwhile, accept our united kindest love, and believe me, ever yours, most affectionately,

MILLICENT CUMMINGS.

'P.S.—I enclose the addresses of three *pensions* which I heard highly recommended, as respectable, and *very cheap*.'

'Heyday, my dear fellow!' exclaimed Uncle Rupert, not unnaturally, when he saw his young friend, with whom he was sitting at the time, draw himself up on his sofa, crunch the letter up into a ball, and hurl it to the other end of the room, and his slipper after it. 'May I ask if you are gone crazy this hot morning?'

'Yes, I believe I am. Oh, really, though, I beg your pardon, Mr Clavering,' as Rupert gravely picked up the missiles, restoring the one to his hand, and the other to his foot, 'it is too bad to make you do that, but I could not help it. Do read that letter—it is my best excuse.'

Uncle Rupert felt a little curious, so he put on his spectacles, and began—shaking his head over Mrs Cummings's running hand, and numerous dashes, which puzzled him considerably. Arthur lay back the while, grinning with wrath at an invisible enemy, and muttering between his teeth, 'Foreign boarding-houses, indeed! I think I see my dear granny perched up a hundred dirty stairs, with her feet on a charcoal box, and a pie-dish to wash her face in, and water-gruel soup and cat's meet for her dinner! Bind up my wounds—how can the woman be such a goose? Does she suppose I go about depending on ladies tearing up their pocket-handkerchiefs to stop my bleeding to death? Such rubbish! Save and pare, forsooth! Yes, she will do that with anybody—boil down her old goloshes for soup, to save a farthing for a bit of show. And she forgets who used to give her dresses, and trinkets, and take her everywhere, when she was young; and who spent more on her pleasure than she has done all her life long on her own! What would my dear mother have said if she had been here to read that? Oh, what a difference if she were! Well, Mr Clavering—what do you think of that specimen of correspondence?'

'I wish ladies would learn to cross their t's, and not their letters,' said Uncle Rupert, rubbing his eyes, and then his glasses.

'Thrift, thrift, Horatio: the saving of half a sheet of note-paper is not to be despised now-a-days. Can you fancy my granny at a beggarly French or German *pension*, sir—with a lot of old hags round her, taking snuff, and quarrelling over loto and dominoes?'

'Not exactly.'

'We didn't want Cousin Milly's help, but if she had made a real sacrifice to offer her aunt a home, it would have been no more than her due. But no—she makes a principle of not doing it, though it costs her a pang. I say, Mr Clavering, shall you be angry if I have a shy with the other slipper?'

'Yes, very angry indeed. My back is too stiff to be picking up your shot and shell all the morning. It just

serves you right, Master Captain, for not making up your mind at once to take the advice of your elders; and so, if you don't decide as we wish you to do, without another hour's delay, I'll write to Mrs Millicent Cummings, and beg her to interfere.'

'Don't mention anything so awful,' said Arthur. 'I must give you fair notice, and Miss Clavering too, of what had never occurred to me before. My Cousin Milly has a decided weakness for visiting her relations, no matter how inconvenient it may be; and if we are discovered to be in clover at Lawleigh, we shall never be able to prevent her coming after us. She never waits for an invitation, for fear of not getting it—it is one of her principles.'

Uncle Rupert could not help shrugging his shoulders as he thought of his own suggestion to Anne, now likely to be more accurate than they supposed.

'Well, what if she does?' he said, good-humouredly, 'we can stand a siege, if necessary. You have not studied under Todleben for nothing; and I know a thing or two about stockade defences. And if she carries the place after all, I would back my niece Anne to hold her own against any woman in England, or Australia either, to say nothing of Nurse Moyle in reserve. Let her come! we'll find a way of dealing with her, even if we put her on French boarding-house rations, as she would put Mrs Sydney. Ha! ha! ha! it wouldn't be a bad idea!'

So having exploded resentment in a good laugh, they began to discuss in serious earnest the arrangement of their future plans.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### HESTER.

WHEN Mrs Atterbury saw her advisers again, all traces of the previous day's misunderstanding, as well as of Despard's excited behaviour, had disappeared. A brief apology was made to her, on the plea of mental and bodily fatigue, and he and Mr Martock appeared on a much more friendly footing than before. They seemed rather in haste to leave her



presence, and her anxious inquiries for her husband were silenced by the reply that as her hiding-place had certainly been discovered, it would be hazarding too much, at present, either for him to come to her lodging, or for her to be traced to his. Why, then, did he not write, if only a line? He had not courage, and they did not like to press him to exertion.

'Patience, patience a little longer!' said Mr Martock, seeing that Eleanor could hardly bear this last trial; 'when he finds what you are doing for him, he will more readily believe you can forgive.'

'Does he require such a proof? I only wish it could be given him to-night!'

'That is not possible; but to-morrow if you will, when I see you again, something may be accomplished in earnest the sooner the better for all of us.'

They left her accordingly to her solitary imprisonment which was telling on her strength and courage to an extent of which they were not aware. This was the Friday of this fearful week, which now seemed like a lifetime; but Eleanor Atterbury took no count of the hours. She could not think clearly—her powers of reasoning obeyed her will no longer; she found herself dwelling on the same idea over and over again without apprehending its meaning, and was oppressed by a constant sense of a burden of responsibility, which she had not strength either to carry or to shake off. Miss Craggs, who watched her closely, began at last to speak so decidedly about medical advice, that Eleanor was frightened into making an angry answer; whereat her hostess withdrew, not a little affronted.

'If people choose to kill themselves, let them,' she said, and she sent up the tea by her maid, instead of carrying it herself. She thought she heard a scream soon after, but took little heed, until she was startled by seeing Mrs Atterbury, white and breathless with haste, rush into her kitchen, seize a plate of flour from the dresser, and with the hurried explanation that 'the poor girl had scalded herself, run upstairs again as if she did not know what illness meant. Following more deliberately, she found her maid Hester, a heavy, coarse, broad-faced girl, with the muscles of a grenadier, sitting sobbing on the floor, a great stream and slop all over the carpet, and Mrs Atterbury tying up her left arm in one of her own cambric handkerchiefs.

'She tripped with the kettle in a hole of the carpet, Miss Craggs,' she said, apologetically, seeing the stern surprise with which the mistress contemplated the scene of disaster, 'but I hope she is not much hurt. There, my poor girl, keep it well covered with the flour, and do not cry any more, if you can help it, for tears are more wearing than pain.'

'She ought to be much obliged to you, ma'am, I'm sure, great careless thing that she is,' said Miss Craggs, in whom Hester's howls excited no compassion at all; 'and it serves her right for not mending the carpet, as I told her to do a week ago. There, hold your noise, do, and go down stairs, and look where you put your feet another time. Such a mess as the place is in, not fit for a Christian to sit down, with your clumsiness! I must fill your tea-pot from my own kettle, I suppose, Mrs Mornay, or you'll get no tea to-night.'

'There is no hurry,' said Eleanor, with a kind smile at Hester, which completed the fascination of that not very susceptible young person.

It was, most likely, the first time in her life that she had been soothed so gently, or had felt so soft a touch, and she seemed unable to resist the longing for a repetition of the pleasure. Several times that evening was Mrs Atterbury startled from her lonely musings by the heavy foot stumbling against her door, and the apparition of the broad, not over-clean face, peering round with a grin and nod of intense satisfaction, and vanishing instantaneously on being recognized. Once the vision was accompanied by the voluntary information, 'I'm a deal better;' and another time, the damaged arm was thrust forward, to display its present envelope of doubtful-looking calico, with the indignant comment, 'She's took away the 'andkercher!' Probably this was detected by the ruling power, for it was the last appearance that night, to Eleanor's great relief.

She certainly owed Mrs Atterbury something, for the exertion Eleanor made, cost her a worse night than usual, and even Mr Martock was rather dismayed when he saw her next.

He came prepared to explain what had been done, and what was now to do, for the carrying out of her sacrifice; but found her incapable of understanding him, and as her signature was of the first importance, this was a serious matter. Eleanor felt that it was so, and that he meant her to feel it; and tried to command her attention in vain. Be-

fore she was aware, her head had sunk back, and an interval elapsed, during which she just knew that people came in and out, but was unable to open her eyes. By-and-by she found herself lying on her bed, where she fell into a heavy sleep of some hours' duration.

It was broken at last, by the slamming of her door, and when her dim eyes were able to discern objects clearly, she discovered that Hester had come into the room, and was looking at her as complacently as if startling a patient out of her sleep were the very perfection of good nursing and care.

'What are you doing here? What has been the matter with me?' asked Mrs Atterbury, trying to rouse herself, and wondering why her head felt so strange.

Hester nodded gravely, without stirring from where she stood. 'You're not to get off your bed. I'm to see that you don't.'

'Who told you to come to me?'

'*She* told me; and you wasn't to talk, neither.'

'My good girl, your mistress is very kind, but I am quite well. I must have been a little over-tired, that is all. You need not wait.'

'I'd rather.'

'But I would rather you did not.'

'Can't help that. I'm to see to you till she comes back. She won't be long.'

Eleanor, annoyed by this pertinacity, made an attempt to leave her bed, but Hester was upon her in a minute, and laid her down as if she had been a refractory child. 'You musn't do that,' she said, shaking her head, 'or she'll be as cross as two sticks. She's awful when she's put out, I can tell you; and there's been *such* a row down-stairs between her and the gentlemen all along of you—I heard them from the scullery, and run up, thinking they was a fighting. My! how she did give it them to be sure, for cheating you—now, do'ee be still, for the doctors will be here in a minute, I dare say.'

'What doctors? Not for me, I hope?'

'Yes, for you. There, don't ye stir, and I'll tell you all about it,' sitting down on the bed, to make sure of her charge while enjoying the delight of telling her story. 'She's gone one way, and the gentlemen another, to see who'll get a doctor first; but they had a grand quarrel about it, and says she

at last, for I heard her, 'It's a sin and a shame,' she says, 'to deceive a poor young creature first, and then kill her by inches, and it shan't be on *my* conscience any longer,' she says; 'she ought to know the worst, and be told the real truth,' she says, 'and if you won't tell it her, I'll find those as will.'

'She said *that*?' said Eleanor, trembling violently.

'Oh yes; she don't mind what she says when she's in one of her tempers; and she frightened them both, for they went off looking as if they didn't like it, and one says to the other, 'That's a dangerous woman—we must manage better than this.' My! how you do shiver—you quite shake the bed. I'll run down and make a blanket hot at the kitchen fire, and you'll be as warm as a toast in five minutes.'

She was gone, and Eleanor was the next minute sitting on the side of the bed, with wide eyes, and throbbing pulse, holding her temples slightly, that she might command her reason for a moment. There could be no doubt; she was being deceived—something terrible had happened, and they would not tell her. Frederick—oh, merciful Heaven! one hour of strength—but one, to find him, and indeed know the worst! She would go to him now—this moment, before any one came up again to prevent her. They said he was near at hand; she would find him, no fear of that—if only she could get down-stairs, and out of the house. And her hands were making tremulous efforts to tie her bonnet, and put on her shawl, when Hester and the blanket returned.

'Oh, I say, this won't do!' she began, but Mrs Atterbury stopped her imperatively.

'Do you wish to earn half a sovereign, Hester?'

'I'd like to *have* it,' was the significant, though evasive reply

'I will give you one if you will help me. I am not ill—I do not want a doctor—I only want to go out, and they will not let me.'

'What is to hinder you? There's the door.'

'You are sure no one is there?'

'There's no one in the house but me and the first floor, and he's lame with one leg, and as deaf as a post. I tell you what, though, you'd best have a cab—you'll never be able to walk—I'll fetch you one in a minute.'

'Yes, do,' said Eleanor, who was mechanically filling her travelling-bag with necessities, without much preception of

what they were, 'only be quick, be quick, or it will be too late. Too late!' she went on repeating to herself, when alone, 'too late!' If it is so, and they have kept it from me—oh, my beloved, we will die together! Better so, and all this turmoil over—die and be forgotten, and hide our shame in the grave. No one will scorn us there—No one will come there to tell us we ruined them. Oh, Frederick, Frederick! why did I ever let you go away alone? If I had been with you, I might have saved you. Yes, and I may yet, if I only can reach you in time!' And here, unable to bear it longer, she took up her bag, and made her way to the top of the stairs, where Hester presently found her sitting, leaning against the balusters.

'Whatever are you a doing of there? I've got you a cab at the archway, so come along, if you will come. She'll be back directly, and won't she scold me nicely? But I don't care. You'll give me the half-sovereign, won't you? Now then, hold up, or you'll go down-stairs quicker than you'll quite like.'

It was only by her support, indeed, that Mrs Atterbury reached the cab; and when asked where she wished to be driven, her look of bewilderment was piteous enough to cause Hester strong misgivings; while the cabman seemed a little doubtful of her sanity. Something in their manner made her sensible of this, for she was roused to speak more decidedly; gave Hester a whole sovereign instead of the promised half, at which she uttered a very war-whoop of ecstasy, and desired the driver to go straight on, and take the check-string. The sight of her purse seemed to satisfy his conscience, for he made no objection, and had just put his vehicle in motion, when a man, whom Hester had not observed before, darted from a neighbouring doorway, and ran nimbly in pursuit.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### MISS CRAGGS KEEPS HER RESOLUTION.

'I TELL you frankly, Compton—fill your glass, my boy, you are drinking nothing—this dreadful business has taken

me so completely by surprise, I hardly know where I am, or which way to turn myself. I came up to town directly, of course, and as you see the house is all in confusion. My daughters are staying with friends—they are sadly cut up as you may suppose; and I am sure I have been so worried and harassed all day long, I am just fit for nothing. But as I was saying—you like that claret, I think? it is the last of the batch Fred Atterbury got me in the winter—do fill your glass—what was I talking about? Oh! I was going to say, that if you can quite conveniently accommodate me as you suggested, for a week or two, it will certainly save me a good deal of trouble. I have not much to lose, as all the world knows, but this blow has hit me hard, I confess; it is very inconvenient, and people are so savage about it they turn round upon *me*, as if it were my doing.'

'No news of Mrs Atterbury yet, I suppose?'

'No, poor thing; but she will write when she can, I know. She is aware how I am circumstanced, and that in point of fact I have as serious claims on her as anybody. I was led to expect such a very different state of things, that in one way and another—I do not mind telling such a good fellow as *you*, Tom—I was let in for a good deal; and Eleanor will not allow me to suffer. I am quite easy on that score.'

'Had you no idea, then, what was in the wind?'

'No more than you had, Compton. I as much believed Frederick Atterbury was what he seemed, as that I am sitting here, and you are opposite me. Why, is father was the most respected man—had such a character for charity and all that sort of thing—took the chair at meetings, and made speeches for the missionaries—was quite a card on all those occasions—who was to suppose what was the real state of things? Why, they were bankrupts when Fred was made a partner, and he must have known it then, or soon after.'

'Did Jack Despard suspect anything?'

'Who ever knows what Despard suspects? I should not wonder if he did, for it is not easy to hide anything that he chooses to find out. I have not seen him since, but when I do, I shall let him understand what I think. You are not taking your wine.'

'Indeed, I am; I am only unhappy to think it is the last of the batch. Whatever Fred Atterbury chose, was sure to be good. It is glorious.'

'So it is, and if it were not for this threatening gout, I should enjoy it too—as much as I can enjoy anything just now—heigho! Then it will not put you out of your way, my dear boy, to do me that little service?'

'Oh, not in the least. You shall have it on Monday. It is lucky Mrs Atterbury's fortune was secured.'

'Her father's will took care of that; everything was to be entirely in her own power. I suppose they will settle in Italy; they can live like princes there, and we shall run over and see them. What say you to making one, Tom?'

'To see Mrs Atterbury I do not care how far I go, but I would not cross the street to meet her husband. I only hope he will treat her well—I wouldn't trust him.'

'Oh, my dear fellow, that is going too far. I am as sure of his attachment for her, as——'

'As you were that he had plenty of money; and the one may be as true as the other.'

'You are a shrewd boy—uncommonly so for your time of life. Where did you pick up that knowledge of the world? But you are wrong for once: it is all right in that quarter, I promise you. They would not have gone off together so quietly, if she were not in his confidence. They will do very well when all this has blown over—many people do. It is very dreadful, and very abominable, we all know that—but it is no use making it worse than one is obliged, and with poor Eleanor's income——What is it, Parkes?' as the butler appeared at his elbow with a face foreboding business. 'I can't see any one when I am at dinner—you know that.'

'Certainly, Sir John. If you please, Sir John, there is a person here who says she has something very particular indeed to say to you, Sir John.'

Parkes and his master were on sufficiently confidential terms for this introduction to carry more weight than if it had come from an inferior councillor. Sir John looked up inquiringly. 'Eh? humph! what then, I suppose—what a nuisance; can't you see her for me, Parkes, eh?'

'Why not have her in here?' suggested Compton, who had drank just wine enough to make him ripe for a frolic 'is she young or old, Parkes?'

'Not particularly young, sir, I should say.'

'Oh, bother! But never mind—send her in, and if there is anything too private for a third party, I'll vanish.'

The butler glanced at his master, but whether from a

desire to humour his young ally, or from a secret dread of facing the unknown visitor alone, Sir John only nodded assent, and in a few minutes Parkes introduced—Miss Craggs.

She came in with no appearance of timidity or nervousness, and stood erect, and as it were, defiant, midway between the door and the table; returning a brief salute in answer to Sir John's slight bow, and showing plainly, that till the butler had withdrawn, she would not open her lips. 'Set a chair, Parkes, and you may go,' said his master. The chair was set, but Miss Craggs took no notice of it. She waited till the door closed on the servant, and then remarked, somewhat sharply for an introductory speech, that if Sir John Pierpoint preferred speaking to her alone, he had better be quick about it.

'If you prefer it, madam,' said Sir John, blandly, without moving from his seat, 'or if you think it necessary.'

'Not at all; it does not matter to me in the least. Do you know a young married lady of the name of Mornay?'

'Eh? what? Mornay? No—stay—what is she like?'

'What is *who* like, sir?'

'Mrs Mornay, ma'am.'

'How should I know, sir?'

'Well, you know, I suppose, as you mention her.'

'Then you don't, sir? I understood she had been a ward of yours.'

Sir John's red face grew several shades paler: Compton leaned half across the table.

'A ward of mine? I never had but one—Mrs Atterbury. If you come from her pray say so at once.'

'Perhaps you will tell me if those are her initials, sir; and then I shall know.'

She threw a pocket-handkerchief on the table. Sir John put up his glasses, and as quickly put them down again.

'E.M.A. Eleanor Mornay Atterbury. Not a doubt of it, and I believe I could swear to the handkerchief.'

'Very good, sir: then the long and the short of the matter is this—a gentleman took rooms at my house in the City, a few days ago, for a Mrs Mornay, and she arrived late at night, and has been there ever since.'

'And she sent you to tell me? Why did not you come sooner?'

'Why did I come at all, sir, you had better ask. If I had waited till I was sent, I might have waited a long time;



and as to sending, I don't know any one who has the right to send me anywhere. But I wasn't going to see a young creature die in my house, unbeknown to her friends, and cheated into the bargain; so, as nobody else would let you know, I am just come to tell you. She is that ill, with cough, and bad nights, and worry, that it will be downright murder if something is not done for her—and now you know the truth.'

'You will go directly, Sir John, said Compton, who had started up, and was standing restlessly on the hearth-rug.

'Certainly I shall—I must. Poor dear girl! I can't understand it. Where is her husband? Is no one with her, Mrs —, ahem! I did not quite catch your name. I beg your pardon.'

'Craggs, Sir John. Miss Craggs, if you please. No, I have seen no Mr Mornay, or Mr Anybody, but those who brought her there, and make her do and believe what they please. I dare say they could tell you what you want to know.'

'What gentlemen do you mean?

'What gentlemen, Sir John? Two that seemed to know *you* very well—Mr Martock and Mr Despard.'

Compton whistled significantly, and looking at his host, was struck with the blank perplexity in his face.

'Come, sir,' he said, with the freedom he had lately assumed, from a half-conscious sense of power, 'we have no time to lose. If I might suggest such a thing, I should propose ringing to order a room to be got ready for Mrs Atterbury, and a Hansom for you and me. This good lady, I suppose, will go home in a cab, and we could follow her.'

'We, my dear boy?'

'Yes; you must let me come. Hear me out; I do not want to show myself, or intrude on Mrs Atterbury, but I can sit in the cab, and if you want a doctor, or a carriage ordered, or any one telegraphed for, I can run and do it, don't you see? Your horses, I suppose, are not in town, and it would take too long to send for mine. A Hansom will be the quickest.'

'Very true. I am really much obliged to you, Tom; and to Miss—Miss Snaggs, too—very much obliged. I wish you would sit down, ma'am, and take a glass of wine.'

'Much obliged to *you*, Sir John, but I am teetotal, and my name is Craggs.'

'Craggs! I beg your pardon—you must excuse me. Then, if you will pull the bell, Tom——'

Parkes answered the summons with suspicious alacrity, and they were soon rolling in Miss Craggs' wake towards the City.

'This is really very good of you, Tom,' said Sir John, after they had proceeded some way in silence. 'There was no occasion for your giving yourself this trouble.'

Compton took the cigar out of his mouth to reply, with great sincerity, that it was no trouble at all, but a pleasure, as he fully expected they were in for a row.

'I sincerely hope not,' said the Baronet, who by no means shared his enthusiasm.

'Well, if Fred Atterbury has hid his wife from you, for reasons of his own, he will not be particularly charmed to see you turn up.'

'Her illness will be a sufficient reason for my interference.'

'I don't think so: depend upon it, they are shutting her up, and bullying her out of her money; and if so, they will not let you see her without a battle.'

'I am not afraid of *that*, Tom; we are not living in the days of Montoni; but I am quite aware that I may give offence, and I own I am not sorry to have a kind-hearted lad like yourself to back me.'

'I'll stand by you, never fear!' cried the young man, slapping the elder one's knee with a vehemence that made him wince. 'And remember, if money is wanted to help Mrs Atterbury, you may draw on me to my last shilling. Only, whatever you do, don't let her find it out.'

'It is like yourself, Compton; all that is generous and considerate. I frankly confess I am running a risk, and it may be a great comfort to fall back on you. If Martock sent this good woman, which is not impossible, it is all right; but he is a terrible fellow to deal with when his plans are crossed.'

'Who cares for his plans when Mrs Atterbury's health and happiness are at stake?'

'Very true; she is our first consideration, of course; and therefore, my dear boy, we cannot be too careful and prudent. You must promise me to be on your guard.'

'Trust me—I know what I am about. I am very glad I came.'

It was more than Sir John could have echoed with truth,

for he had misgivings enough to make him wish himself anywhere else. Nothing further was said till they drew up at the archway, through which their guide had just passed. In spite of his resolutions, Compton's curiosity so far prevailed over discretion, that he jumped out after Sir John, and followed him at a few paces' distance. He saw Miss Craggs go in, and presently heard her calling, 'Sir John! Sir John!' He ran forward instantly, and was at the Baronet's heels as he entered the house.

There stood Mr Martock, stern and menacing; Miss Craggs, holding up her hands in wrath and dismay; and Hester whimpering, with her apron at her eyes.

Mrs Mornay was gone, and no one could say where. Compton pressed Sir John's arm. 'I told you they would not let you see her without a fight.'

'Hush, my dear fellow, hush,' said Sir John, wiping his forehead with a hand that shook visibly, 'pray be quiet. Mr Martock, I am sure, will give us all the information in his power. I do not quite understand—how did she go, and when? I thought she was seriously ill, or I might have hesitated, perhaps, about coming.'

'You came to see your ward, Sir John, did you?' said Mr. Martock.

'Well, yes—I certainly was made anxious—you know how deservedly dear——'

'Miss Craggs has evidently sources of information peculiar to herself, then,' said Mr Martock with a look at that lady which might have appalled a less intrepid spirit, 'but we will talk of that another time. The present question is more important—where is this lady gone?'

'Where is her husband?' asked Compton, quickly.

'Ah, are *you* there, Mr Compton? I did not happen to observe you. Sir John is very happy in his selection of friends.'

'He has got one, sir, at any rate, who will stand by him in this matter through thick and thin. Mrs Atterbury shall not be wronged with impunity.'

'I was not aware, Mr Compton, that the lady you mention had given you any authority to interfere in her affairs. If she has, that alters the case.'

'Pray, my dear Tom——' began Sir John.

'I have asked a question, Sir John, to which I have had no answer. Perhaps you may be more successful.'

'Ay, just try, Sir John,' put in Miss Craggs, on whom Mr Martock's dark looks seemed quite thrown away, 'and see what answer *you* will get. Where is the lady's husband, that they go on telling her is close at hand, waiting till she has done all they want? Where is he? Can they show him? Here comes the man who knows,' as Despard appeared, and stood looking at the group, with eyebrows elevated, and lips strongly inclined to whistle, 'and unless he happens to be too sober, there is a chance of his telling you the truth.'

'Thank you, Miss Craggs,' said Despard, raising his hat; 'your good opinion is becoming something to be proud of. Really, gentlemen, this is a most agreeable surprise, and a pleasant way of spending the evening, but do not you think if we were to adjourn out of this passage into a sitting-room, it would be nearly as convenient?'

The proposal was silently agreed to, by Miss Craggs opening the door of the room she had lent them once before. They all entered, except Hester, who stood outside, making a very little penitence go a long way.

'Now, Mr Despard,' said Mr Martock, 'we have to inform you, if you do not know it already, that Mrs Atterbury has disappeared, and Sir John Pierpoint wishes to know where she is gone?'

Despard's face showed concern, not unmixed with alarm. He knew nothing of the matter, not having seen Mrs Atterbury all day.

'It was not by your recommendation, then, that she took this step?'

'Certainly not.'

'Very good; but Sir John, and Mr Compton too, Mr Despard, are very anxious to know where your friend Mr Atterbury is. Perhaps you can tell them?'

'I can tell them *this*, at any rate,' said Despard, whose colour had risen during these questions, 'as far as I know, Frederick Atterbury is safe. I wish I could say as much for his poor young wife, but she shall be found, or I'll know why.'

'Then Atterbury has escaped?' said Compton, eagerly.

'Escaped—there is no other word. And it was high time he did, for some who pretended to be serving him were playing him false for their own ends, and another day it might have been too late.'

‘And why was not his wife told that he was gone!’

Despard shrugged his shoulders, with a slight motion of his head towards his colleague.

‘Why, indeed?’ exclaimed Miss Craggs, ‘but for the reason I told you, to get out of her all they could. Now, gentlemen, I wash my hands of this business entirely, and shall be glad to wash my house too. If that poor young lady comes back, I shall just tell her she must go to those as can take care of her, for I can’t, and won’t, and the sooner you all make me free of you, the better. And you, you troublesome, meddling, disobedient creature, what are you doing there, blacking the paint with your dirty fingers, and the scullery not cleaned yet? Go along down-stairs with you.’

And away she went, sweeping Hester before her.

‘There are some deliverances,’ observed Mr Despard, as he shut the door, ‘for which it is impossible not to be grateful. May I ask, gentlemen, how this curious conjunction of planets took place?’

Sir John hurriedly explained; he had understood Eleanor was ill—he supposed the woman of the house had picked up his name, as those people always did; he had no idea but that his friends meant all for the best; he only wished he had been consulted, and much of this might have been avoided.

‘We wished to spare you, Sir John, as well as your ward,’ said Mr Martock, slowly; ‘but as you have both put that out of our power, you shall henceforth know and share everything.’

‘And all this time,’ interrupted Compton, impatiently, ‘who is going to look for Mrs Atterbury?’

‘I think, with your permission, Mr Compton, that Sir John Pierpoint and myself will be fitter persons for the search than so very energetic a young gentleman, however great his merit and other qualifications. There is one thing, which Mrs Atterbury’s friends cannot be too soon aware of—that there are some designing individuals about, sharers of poor Frederick’s follies, who are only waiting their opportunity to make her sensitive feelings their prey, and plunder her of her property, under the pretence of redeeming his honour.’

Despard eyed him while he was saying this with a sinister expression, impossible to describe. When he stopped, he turned gravely to Sir John.

'On my honour as a gentleman I know nothing of this step of Mrs Atterbury's; but I can readily imagine that her mind could bear the suspense no longer, and it was against my wish that she was kept in it. If I had had my own way, she should have known all I knew, and henceforth she *shall*. Tom,' laying his hand suddenly on Compton's arm, 'if our elders go one way in this quest, suppose you and I go another, and I'll be bound we young fellows hit off the scent first.'

Neither of the new comers could reasonably oppose this arrangement, though both were manifestly dissatisfied. Sir John seemed to acquiesce as if he had no choice, and Compton swallowed his indignation in the hopes of learning more. Despard walked leisurely on with him till the others had passed them in the cab; then he stopped short. 'Wait for me, Tom, one minute; I have a question to ask.' He darted back, and Compton had leisure to wonder whether, after all, some trick had not been played, before he returned out of breath.

'Just as I thought, Tommy, he said, taking his young companion's arm. 'She was followed by a spy of Martock's.'

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## CHAPTER XIV

### MR. MARTOCK AT HOME.

It was one of Mr Martock's peculiarities to have no regular home, unless his office might be so considered. Like the famous Elwes and others, he owned several tenements in different parts of London, and whenever one happened to be vacant, took up his abode in it, with most philosophical indifference as to comfort or locality. His present residence was on the Surrey side—an old-fashioned house and garden, one of the few relics left of the times when the neighbourhood was a rural one, and which the march of improvement has, no doubt, since then swept away. Dilapidated and damp, as was the building, the shrubs, when their first green was still unblackened, gave it a cheerful aspect in summer,

and it had seldom been long without a tenant. The absolute necessity for repairs, however, kept it uninhabited except by its proprietor and one servant—accustomed to live anywhere, and to dispense with the amenities of civilised existence.

The inquiries after Mrs Atterbury having led them in this direction—they had believed themselves once on her track, but nothing had resulted from it—and everything having been done that could be done that night, Sir John had courteously insisted on setting his companion down at his own door. In his secret soul, he hoped to find Eleanor at——Place, and his great dread was now that Mr Martock would offer to go home with him. Greatly relieved by his acceptance of his offer, he was beginning to wish him a hearty good night, when he discovered that Mr Martock had set his heart on his going in, and when Mr Martock's heart was set on anything, great or small, it required a very determined nature to prevent his getting it. Sir John alighted, and limping along the rough gravel walk, tried to admire and praise, while thinking it in private the most detestable cockney hole he had ever seen. Certainly, whatever the 'desirable summer residence' might have been, when the paint was fresh outside, and there was plenty of good furniture within, and cheerful faces looked out of every window, it was a very 'moated grange' for dreariness in its present state, when its master opened the hall door with his latch-key, and rang a hand-bell that stood on the table, not to summon his servant on hospitable cares intent, but, as he significantly explained, to tell him to keep away. A small moderator lamp was burning in readiness, with which he ushered his visitor into a little sitting-room, with windows opening down to the floor: a huge writing-table, with drawers and shelves, and a bookcase crammed with packages, being the principal furniture.

'These are my household gods, Pierpoint; they go with me wherever I move,' he said, observing Sir John's uneasy glance at both. 'Not quite your Belgravian notion of elegance, but use is second nature, and I should not be comfortable without them.'

'Very convenient, I dare say, very much so,' said Sir John, trying to rub his hands pleasantly, but failing; 'is this your only room?'

'This, and the next, opening into the garden, and a bedroom above. Quite enough for a plain man like myself. I

cannot afford your style of living, Pierpoint ; and to tell you the truth——'

'Don't begin with that word, my dear fellow. I have a particular objection to it.'

'To truth, have you ?'

'As some people tell it.'

That is unfortunate, for hear it you must, sooner or later—and why not now ?'

'You have been throwing out these disagreeable hints all the evening. What do you mean by them ? Is it *my* fault that Atterbury has run away ? He has taken me in as well as you.'

'I believe you. He *did* take you in. You thought that in your ward's rich husband, you had secured an inexhaustible fount of supply. I can feel for your disappointment ; but as it is so, you must act accordingly. I did not mean to trouble you just yet ; you have brought it upon yourself by interfering, and your ward has done you no good by her treatment of me. You know that I could sell you up to-morrow, if I chose.'

'A pleasant thing to tell a man in your own house.'

'If it keeps you from ruin, you may be grateful for the reminder. Frederick Atterbury had no secrets from me, before he married : this escape of his, managed by Despard, was his first, and if he is wise, it will be his last. I know how you courted, and invited, and endured him, for the sake of his money ; and he knew it too—no one better. And you both know that it was part of the compact between us, that his wife's affairs should be entrusted unreservedly to my management.'

'Well, and so they have been, I am sure.'

'They have, because I have taken care they should. To tell you the truth (I beg your pardon for the obnoxious expression), I do not trust one of you more than I can help.'

'It rather strikes me that the feeling is becoming reciprocal,' said Sir John, sarcastically.

'True ; Atterbury has played me false, and now his wife has been set on to try the same experiment. It is a dangerous game, and they will find it so.'

'You don't think that poor girl can be gone after him ?'

'If Despard has told her where he has gone, and is in the secret of her movements, it is not impossible ; but I rather



think you will find her in — Place when you arrive. In either case, I shall know by to-morrow morning.'

'Of course, my dear fellow, I would send.'

'Thank you : I am equally obliged, but I believe I should be informed, whether you thought proper to tell me or not.'

'Sir John moved uneasily in his chair, and coughed to conceal his rage.

'The fact is, Pierpoint, you are none of you aware of what you are doing when you begin to shuffle with me. This young man's father tried it once—but the lesson he received warned him against a second attempt. Frederick has now had his turn ; he is supposed to be out of my reach—time will show whether he is or not. He knows when I held up his house from ruin, a year ago, on what terms I did so. Those terms he has tried to break ; let him see if he can abide the consequences.'

'Well, my dear Martock, I am sorry you are vexed, but it really is not my fault. I never advised——'

'No, no ; you have too much sense, I am convinced, to think of putting me off by smooth words and clever artifices. On the contrary, if you do find that misguided young lady in — Place, or if she comes to you in the course of to-morrow, you will counsel her, if she is wise, to accept terms while they are offered. By-and-by it will be too late.'

'What terms do you offer ?'

'The best she could expect : by the sacrifice of part of her fortune to secure herself and her husband safe enjoyment of the rest.'

'But her fortune is safe already—no one can touch that.'

'You are right, and she is a lady with very enthusiastic notions, and if not prevented, will throw it all into the quagmire of the bank's liabilities.'

'Oh !'

'That would not suit your views, Sir John, would it ? Now attend to what I say, and make her understand it thoroughly, if you can. My claims are of years' standing and must be satisfied first, without question ; then the claims of those for whom I am acting, and who will be guided by my advice. When we are satisfied, there will still be enough of her fortune to live on comfortably abroad ; and I will spare her and him the degradation of a public exposure.'

'Things are public enough as it is ; I do not know what more you would spare him.'

'No, it is not likely you should ; you do not know what I have kept back, but in a few days there will be more stringent inquiry made, and if I am not satisfied *then*—look here !' He took a thick packet out of a drawer and flung it on the table. 'There are witnesses in that packet, Pierpoint, to stifle which his father would have given me any money—that belonged to other people. Let those seals once be opened before the world, and the very name of Atterbury will become a shame to those that bear it !'

'Oh, this is too horrible—I cannot believe—'

'Believe or not, as you please. I have only given you this small insight into the real state of the case, as a warning : do not drive me into the necessity of being more explicit in my revelations. I am unwilling to proceed to extremities with you or her. I do not wish to break an innocent woman's heart, or to lower an elderly man like yourself in the eyes of your friends and the world. I do not *wish* to do so, I say. If you compel me, the fault will be your own.'

'Then I am to understand that either I or poor Eleanor, or both, are to be your victims, vice Frederick Atterbury, absent without leave ? Upon my word, Martock, you are monstrous hard to deal with. Well, I promise you I will do my best—only give me time.'

'Look here, Pierpoint, I am not quite so hard as you suppose. Only convince your ward of what I have told you, and we will make a new arrangement of your own affairs, which will put everything on an easier footing.'

'You promise me that, on your honour ?'

'On my word, which *I* never break, allow me to observe.'

'Then on mine, I will do all you want. I cannot help myself. I only wish Atterbury had been at the bottom of the sea before he saw Eleanor's face.'

'So did he, many a time—perhaps at the very moment that he married her.'

'How dare you say such a thing, sir—and to me ?'

'It can be nothing new to you, who saw the irritable state he was in up to the last moment—you, who would have turned him out of your house if you had not believed him rich. Ask your friend Despard—he was behind the scenes all the time ; he knows how you shut your eyes, your

ears, your senses—everything but your door, and your hand. Or, if you like it better, there are letters up-stairs in my room which will tell you more than even Despard could. Atterbury had some conscience left, and he knew that though that poor young lady was ready to give him all she had in the world, he had nothing to give her in return—not even a heart !’

‘It is a lie—it must be,’ gasped Sir John. ‘I will not believe it, unless I see it with my own eyes. Where are those letters ?’

‘They are among his father’s papers in my possession. I have no objection to let you examine them, if you will step up-stairs with me. The better acquainted you are now with all the circumstances, the better qualified you will be to give advice when called upon.’

He took the lamp off the table as he spoke, and making his guest precede him out of the room, locked the door behind them.

It was full half an hour before they came down again, and then Sir John, with a hasty adieu, hurried out of the house into the cab he had kept waiting so long. Mr Martock stood a little while looking out after him, with his hands in his pockets, and a smile on his lips, that made them harder in their expression than before. The lightning playing in his face made him step back and close the door. ‘An ugly night for her cough,’ he thought. ‘I hope she is there, and safe in bed by this time.’ He rang the hand-bell twice; his servant appeared instantly.

‘Has Gayman been here this evening ?’

‘Yes, sir; he has been waiting some time, sir.’

‘Send him up.’ He had taken up a half sitting position against the table, and was looking over some circulars that had been left during the day, when the person he had sent for stood bowing before him; only vouchsafing him a careless nod as he asked, ‘Well, what news ?’

The spy, for such he was, and the same who had followed Despard to and from Twalmly, hesitated a moment, and looked at the sitting-room door.

‘What are you grimacing for? It is all right, or I should not have sent for you.’

‘I beg your pardon, sir; I didn’t know. I hope I did right, sir ?’

'If you did as I desired you. Where were you this evening?'

'At my post, sir, of course; and if I hadn't been looking out sharp, she would have given me the slip after all. I had to be as quick as thought—but to serve *you*, sir, who are always so generous and so good to me——'

'Gayman!'

'I beg your pardon, sir—I didn't know. I was going to mention, I had only time to run after the cab, and get the driver to let me mount the box. I gave him a hint, coming nearer, putting his hand to his mouth, 'that the poor lady's head was a little——' he tapped his forehead significantly, and that I knew her friends, and where to take her.'

'Well?' said Mr Martock, signing to him to keep his distance, 'it strikes me, Gayman, that your own head will not be much better, if you go on drinking as you have been doing to night.'

'Drinking? Me, sir? Only the merest, weakest drop in the world, to wash the dust out of my throat this hot night—nothing more, I do assure you, sir. How is she now, your dear lady?'

'What do you mean by speaking to me like that?'

'Dear sir, I beg your pardon—I didn't know. She was taken so faint directly she saw me, that I was almost frightened, and I thought it was the best thing to do.'

'To do what? Answer sensibly and soberly, or I can tell you, my man, this is your last day's work for me. Where did you leave the lady—and who is with her?'

'No one is with her, sir: she begged to be left alone.'

'Left—where?'

'Where? Why, in the drawing-room, sir—on the sofa.'

Mr Martock stood upright, looking at him. 'You brought her *here*, did you?'

'Yes, sir: you told me never to let her out of my sight—she got outside that door, and when she fainted in the hall, what else could I do? I beg your pardon—I didn't know.'

His employer put him aside with a look that curdled his blood, and unlocked the sitting-room door, holding up the lamp as he advanced. Except a faint, smoky smell, as of burnt paper, all seemed as he left it; he stepped cautiously to the half-closed door of the other apartment, and standing

still a moment, called her gently by name. There was no answer ; a gush of moist air made his lamp flare as he held it up—the curtains were waving in the breeze, and when he walked to the window, the rain drove into his face. He looked round the room—a decanter with water in it on the table—a low chair overturned—a bow of ribbon on the sofa cushion—were the only traces of its having been occupied. He gave one glance from the window—it looked into the garden, the door of which was swinging to and fro. There could be no doubt how she had escaped ; the question only remained, where had she gone—and what had she overheard ?

‘Idiot ! to bring her here, and leave her unwatched ! Idiot ! to expose me to a false move like this. The next time he drinks when on my business, I will give him leave to do it at my expense. What is to be done now ? She will hardly go to —— Place to-night, and this fool is not to be trusted. I must go myself—but where ?’

He turned back into the other room, set the lamp on the table, and began mechanically locking up the papers he had left lying about. Suddenly he bounded as if he had been struck by a bullet ; seized the lamp, and held it in every direction with one hand, the other meanwhile, feeling wildly about the table, on the chair, on the floor—all in vain. Ha ! the smell of the burnt paper—how could he have overlooked it ? Yes, and here were light fragments of tinder blown by the wind all over the room ; and here was a spot on the fender where the melted wax had run. There could be no doubt—the packet had been destroyed.

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## CHAPTER XV.

### FAMILY FRIENDS.

THE terror that seized Eleanor Atterbury when she recognized the face of the spy against whom she had been so strongly warned, was by no means lessened by the discovery that he was in the service of Mr Martock ; and she suffered herself to be taken into his house from real physical inability

to remonstrate or resist. All her old instinctive dread of her adviser returned with treble force at this unmistakable proof of his treachery ; and when her officious attendants yielded to her request, and left her alone, she sank on the sofa in the state of prostration, almost akin to despair. How long she remained there she did not know ; the rest and quiet in some degree restored her powers, and she probably slept part of the time, as she was first roused by the voices in the next room, speaking of her husband and of her. She would have called to them, but she could not ; like one oppressed with nightmare, she lay, unable to move hand or foot, or to utter a sound, until the closing of the door as they left the room, gave her the momentary stimulus she required, and she sprang from the sofa, with a half-stifled shriek to Sir John for help. He heard her not, and she did not repeat the call. What could he do for her—he who had just pledged himself to give her over, defenceless, into the hands of her enemy ? What could or would any friend do for her now ? Frederick was gone—gone without a word or sign—nay, more, if what that man hinted were true—but that way madness lay—she durst not allow herself to dwell upon it. Every one on whom she had relied had more or less deceived her, and was trying to deceive her still. She would trust none of them—not for a moment. Escape she must—she would, before she was discovered ; and once out of this man's power, she would act and judge for herself. Not that she understood half of what she had heard, or had more than a glimmer of the import of Mr Martock's threats :—what woman ever yet understood the intricate mysteries involved in the word 'affairs ?'—but two or three facts that have been stated she did understand only too well ; they were burning in her brain as she stood there, pressing it with her hands ; and the fire they poured into her veins gave her momentary energy to think and act. The half-stupor of the previous hours had given place to a feverish acuteness of the senses ; and in less time than it could be written, her plan was formed her resolution taken. She had a friend within reach, who could not deceive her ; the spire of his church was visible from the window ; an old family friend of the Atterburys, who had, on that account, been invited to assist at the ceremony of her marriage. He had always treated her with marked kindness ; at first, on Frederick's account, whose father he had dearly loved, and

afterwards on her own. Too much occupied with his parish work to have much leisure to bestow on young ladies, he had yet been sufficiently sensible of the high value she set on his advice to take every opportunity that offered of dropping her such words of warning, of encouragement, and of sympathy, as only an elder can give, and which, to her, were acceptable beyond measure. From his wife and daughters, on the few occasions that they had been able to meet, she had received the most gratifying expressions of regard and good will: they came to church to see her married and had taken leave of her with a mutual promise, that should she ever require the services of old friends, she would not look upon them as new ones. And when could she ever need them as she did now? She would fly to them at once; she would tell Mr Tresham everything, and he would tell her what to do; he would show her her duty, would think for her, act for her, and help her to bear up without sinking—as sink she must, if no one gave her help. She would go at once, and so resolving she took up her bag, and moved to the door. It was locked; and while she was hesitating what to do, her eye was caught by the sealed packet, just visible in the faint, glimmering light cast into the room by the gas-lamp without. It was the impulse of a moment to seize it and rush with it to the window of the next room; the window opened into the garden—there was a side-door which was swinging on its hinges—by that door she could escape unseen. Would it be a sin to take away this terrible witness, and so rescue Frederick's name from a disgrace she durst not think of? Even if it were a sin, should she commit it for his sake? For one dreadful moment of doubt she stood there, holding it before her; the next she had flung it upon the sofa she had just left, and, springing from the window, hurried across the garden without looking behind. Once, as her dress swept against a dark clump of evergreens, she fancied something moved behind it; this only gave wings to her speed, and made her hurry more wildly on.

Fortunately, she had not far to go, and the way was not hard to find, though how she found it, she never knew: but she stood at Mr Tresham's door, breathless and heated with haste, just as a thunder shower, which had been some time gathering, broke over her head.

Perhaps it was a good thing for her that it did come just at that moment: she had begun to ask herself what they

would think of her arriving at that hour, on foot, and alone ; but the terrors of the storm overpowered smaller fears, and seeing the lights still burning in the parlour windows, she took heart of grace, and rang. She had to repeat the summons before it was answered by an old woman in a large bonnet, whom she did not know, and who evidently did not know her, or care to do so.

'Want *who*? Mr Tresham? Can't see anybody. He's very ill.'

'Oh, I am so sorry; it must have been very sudden?'

'Very sudden.' The door would have closed, but for Mrs Atterbury's hand.

'Could I see Mrs Tresham—only for a moment?'

'Can't see nobody—she's a nussing of him.'

'Miss Tresham, then, or Miss Ellen—they would speak to me, if they knew I was here. Pray do not shut me out in the rain till you are sure.'

'They don't want no company—they said so; but I'll tell 'em, and they can do as they like.' She opened the door wider, and allowed the fugitive to come in, under protest: wiped her hands on her coarse apron, and then put her head into the nearest room to say, 'Miss Tresham, ma'am, you're wanted.'

Eleanor heard some observation made, but its import could only be guessed by the rejoinder, 'It's a lady. I told her you was engaged, but she would come in.'

'So inconsiderate!' she heard, in accents of unmistakable vexation, while the old woman turned to her, pointing to the parlour door with her thumb, and hobbled off into her own peculiar region, leaving her to avail herself of the permission or not, as she thought proper.

Miss Tresham saved her from the difficulty of choice, by appearing at the door with a candle. She stopped short, however, when she recognised her visitor, and seemed too astonished to speak or move. Eleanor made a step forward, holding out her hand entreatingly. 'I am sorry to intrude like this; I did not know Mr Tresham was ill; I hope you will excuse my asking to see you.'

'Pray come in, Mrs Atterbury,' was all the reply, in a voice whose very coldness betrayed the effort it cost the speaker; and Miss Tresham, without noticing the offered hand, ushered her into the parlour, where a young man was writing.



‘Charles—Mrs Atterbury.’

The young man started up, with a face all one fierce scarlet glow ; upsetting his ink-bottle in so doing, which gave him an excuse for turning from the visitor after a slight hasty bow, to remedy the mischief with blotting-paper. Eleanor recollected to have met him before, and to have heard (how long ago she could not tell) that he was Mr Tresham’s curate, and Clara’s betrothed.

Her reception had, so far, been so repulsively cold, she hardly knew how to proceed, and found herself dreamily wondering whether this would be the case, in future, wherever she went. Clara Tresham seemed as embarrassed as herself, but her embarrassment was decidedly mixed with anger, and it was as much as she could do to ask in civil terms, to what they were indebted for the honour of this visit ?

‘Is Mr Tresham *very* ill ?’ asked Eleanor, instead of replying.

‘*Very* ill.’ The daughter’s voice was almost choked.

‘Too ill for me to speak to Mrs Tresham—for one moment ?’

‘Yes, indeed, Mrs Atterbury ; I could not expose my mother to—I am very sorry—if there is any message you would like to leave with me I shall be happy to give it.’

‘Would you let me stay with you to-night ?’

There was a dead silence : Miss Tresham looked first at her and then at Mr Lyle, but seemed unable to find a word of reply. This was in itself a reply so painful, the blood rushed again to Eleanor’s brow, and she made a feeble effort to regain the door. ‘I beg your pardon—I have been very presuming—I hope——’ She had only reached the wall, but it was a support, and she felt, if she attempted to move farther, she might fall on the floor ; so she stood leaning against it, till a strong arm quietly drew her forwards, and placed her in a chair. Then she looked up, and found herself alone with the young curate. Miss Tresham he explained, was gone to speak to her mother ; but the explanation conveyed no trace, either by look or word, of apology for inhospitable treatment, and she began to be seriously frightened. Was Mr Tresham in such very imminent danger ? He did not think immediate danger was apprehended, but they were warned when he had an attack of this kind once before, that a second would be very serious.

‘When did this attack come on ?’

'When, madam? Two days ago.'  
'Had he been unwell before?'  
'Rather—and so he felt the shock the more.'  
'He had a shock then?'  
'Mrs Atterbury!'

The stern significance of the tone, and the look that accompanied it, were not to be mistaken, though she did not yet take in their full meaning. 'Oh, Mr Lyle—was it *that*?' He bowed his head, pressing his lips tightly together, as if afraid of letting them speak.

'Ah!' she murmured, 'I had no idea he would feel it so deeply—but then he was such an old and intimate friend.'

'*Friend!*' No language can express the amount of scornful meaning compressed in that one word, as Charles Lyle, thrusting his hands in his pockets, strode fiercely to the fireplace. She sat looking at him a moment as if the word had stunned her; then the real truth flashed across her, and she understood it all.

'Mr Lyle! Mr Lyle!'—she was standing by him now, grasping his arm with both hands—'only tell me—tell me the truth—has he lost anything?'

'Lost anything, Mrs Atterbury?'—the young man literally gnashed his teeth over the words—'I should think he had—every farthing he had to lose—ever farthing he had saved, and if that is not enough to kill a man at his time of life, I don't know what is.'

His manner as he pulled his arm away from her hold, was harsh and almost rude; he was, in truth, too nearly beside himself with grief and exasperation, to consider, as he might the effect of his words. Indeed he had been so enraged at her apparent want of feeling, that perhaps he rather hoped to shame her than otherwise. It was not till the door was opened by Mrs Tresham, and he looked round to see how they would meet, that he was aware how cruel he had been.

Mrs Tresham, one of the kindest, most amiable women in the world, had been enduring a trial severe enough to make her heart hard, and her temper bitter: she came from her husband's sick-bed, with all the weight of his and of her children's wrongs crushing the womanly charity out of her soul; and therefore it is not to be wondered at, if her worn furrowed face wore an unforgiving aspect, as she entered to tell the intrusive wife of her enemy, that from henceforth

all intercourse between them must cease. But the sight of that wife as she stood there, mute and motionless, beneath a burden heavier than her own, well-nigh disarmed her at the onset. She had to recollect the sufferer up-stairs before she could begin with the firm severity she had intended. 'I am very sorry, Mrs Atterbury, but it is quite impossible, under the circumstances—oh no, no, my poor girl—no, no! don't kneel to me—don't cry like that—pray don't! Poor thing—poor thing! I did not mean to be hard to you—it is not your doing. I beg and beseech you to rise; it goes to my heart to see you in such a position!'

It must have been a harder heart than hers that could have seen unmoved one so young, and but lately so happy, bowed down to the dust in an agony of shame and sorrow. All Mrs Tresham's sternness of purpose melted away in the tears with which she stooped over the suppliant figure crouching at her feet, endeavouring, by every soothing word in her power, to persuade her to stand up, but in vain. She desisted at last, signing to Mr Lyle to bring her a chair; then gently, with a degree of tender force that could not be resisted, she moved Eleanor's bonnet, raised her head, and sitting down, laid it against her knees.

'Go up to Mr Tresham, Charles, will you? And tell the girls not to come in just yet. No, keep still, my dear,' as Eleanor made a faint movement, 'you will be the better presently for keeping quiet, and I am in no hurry.'

It was no slight effort of unselfishness to say this, at such a time, but it was quite sincere: not to have won back all they had lost would she have broken that bruised reed, so unexpectedly thrown upon her mercy. The mercy was not wasted; Eleanor felt it to her heart's core, and it gave her resolution to refrain from speaking a word till she could do so without sobbing. She remained perfectly still, except for those grasping sobs, endeavouring to stop the tears that came so fast, and clinging the while to Mrs Tresham's knees, as if she feared her patience or her clemency would fail before she had been heard. As soon as she could command herself, she raised her head, and looked fearfully into her face.

'Is there any hope?'

'Of what, my dear?'

'Of Mr Tresham—of his getting better?'

'We all hope,' said Mrs Tresham, 'but I dare not deceive you or myself. He is very ill.'

'And I am keeping you from him?'

'Yes. Never mind a few minutes, my dear. He would wish it if he knew.'

'You are not angry with me for coming? I heard nothing of this till just now.'

'I quite believe it, my dear.' Mrs Tresham was relenting fast about her staying, but she hardly knew how to say so.

'I do not think,' Eleanor went on, 'that I could ever have dared to speak to you, if I had known it; but now—oh, Mrs Tresham!' she was kneeling now with her hands clasped on her listener's lap, 'if you really do pity me——'

'I do, from my heart, from my soul, my poor girl.'

'Then tell me that you will forgive.'

Mrs Tresham put her hands before her face. 'Pray don't, pray don't, Mrs Atterbury——'

'Oh!' said Eleanor, in a low hollow whisper, 'I know I am asking a hard thing: it must seem almost impossible—and yet what shall I do if you refuse me? I have lost more than you—my heart is almost broken—and I came to you for comfort. Will you send me away quite hopeless—despairing of myself—of *him*—of God's mercy and yours? What would you have me do to win your pardon? What will satisfy you? Call in your daughters—your servants—whoever you will—before them all I will kneel here as I do now—as I ought to kneel, to obtain such a request—before them all implore you, as I do now, by all your own hopes of mercy, forgive him for the love of God! Forgive him, that God may pardon too!'

Her voice had gradually risen to a tone of almost passionate earnestness, but here it failed suddenly, and her head sank once more as low as Mrs Tresham's feet. It was not allowed, however, to remain there; Mrs Tresham could bear it no longer, and was so determined she should rise, she was forced to obey, and allow herself to be placed on a sofa by her side, with her head supported on her shoulder.

'There, my dear, now you are in an attitude in which I can talk to you quietly, if you can bear to hear me. Poor thing, how ill and worn-out you look; you ought to be in bed, I am sure. Did Clara understand you rightly, that you would like to stay here to-night?'

'I did wish it, before I knew; but not now—oh, not now.'

‘Why not, my dear? I will tell you the honest truth, that you may believe me. I came down to send you away. I thought I could never bear to speak to you again; and now I could not bear that you should leave me. Will you stay?’

‘To add to your trouble and anxiety? Oh no!’

‘You are too proud to accept the poor accommodation I can give you? Is that it?’

‘I will thankfully accept it, if——’

‘Listen, my dear; I know what you would imply; and if I could honestly relieve your poor heart by a word, I would. But I am no angel only a sinful creature, full of bad passions; and were I to say I thoroughly forgave, I should be adding sin to sin. Ask yourself, if your Frederick were lying before your eyes—but I will not speak of that. I know I ought to do as you ask me—I knew it before you asked—but I could not, and I cannot yet—God forgive me! I hope I shall be able to do it soon: you must have patience with me and give me time. As for you, my poor child,’ she drew Eleanor nearer, and kissed her on the forehead, ‘if it is any consolation to you to know, I pity and feel for you so much, that for your sake I could almost bring myself to do that, which I could not do for the sake of my Master.’

It was a consolation, as kindness and sympathy always are, and Eleanor’s manner showed she felt it. She was able now to give the explanation she thought due, of her unexpected appearance, briefly stating that her husband had been obliged to leave the country without giving her any instructions, and that she had reason to distrust the fidelity of the advisers in whose hands she was left. What she wanted now was to be sheltered from pursuit, while she considered what was her duty in such an extremity. This, at least, her friend could promise, and gladly would she have held out hopes for the future, but suspecting that her fortune was gone in the general wreck, this was beyond her power. She only advised her to lose no time in obtaining the advice of some able lawyer, and implicitly following it. ‘I am quite sure women only get into trouble when they attempt to manage these things for themselves, my dear, and that is about so much as I am sure of in business matters. Depend upon it, your husband would wish it. Have you no one to whom you could send among your own friends?’

‘I have no friends,’ murmured Eleanor, putting her hand

wearily to her brow. She was becoming too exhausted to think or understand, and Mrs Tresham saw it was time she was at rest. She laid her down on the sofa, and went quietly up-stairs to arrange for her accommodation, almost wondering at herself, that her own burden should feel so much less overwhelming, since she had put her hand under that of another.

She might be pardoned for believing that a blessing had followed the deed, as Mr Tresham was better that night, better the next morning; and with the renewed hope, the courage of his family revived. If he were spared, the loss of their money would sit comparatively lightly on their souls—at least, they felt so then; and Clara herself carried the good news to Mrs Atterbury, whom she knew to be in sore need of such a cordial. Her night had been one of suffering, whether asleep or awake, and she was so crushed and broken with all she had gone through that though she contrived in the middle of the day to rise and dress, she could do no more. A sofa was placed for her use in Mrs Tresham's dressing-room—a small apartment dignified by that well-sounding title, but, in reality, the one private corner she reserved for herself apart from the countless claims of husband and children, household and parish. It was the only shelter she could give Eleanor from the eyes of her friends, relations, and neighbours, who were constantly in and out, to inquire, and condole, and offer advice and help; and whom it would have been terrible to her to meet. Indeed, she shrank from being seen, even by the servants; and Clara, as tender of her feelings now, as she had been reckless the night before, waited on her herself, trying in every way to lessen the painfulness of her position. She helped her to dress, coaxed her to eat, read to her when she could listen, listened to her when she seemed to crave the relief of utterance—and contrived to make this first strange Sunday of her adversity in some degree a day of rest to mind and body.

And now Eleanor Atterbury began to see more clearly the road that lay before her, stretching away into the distance. Hitherto, the distress of her spirits had more or less confused her judgment, and though she had been full of vague plans and conjectures about the future, she had unconsciously relied on Frederick's being at hand to arrange it all. Now, as her nerves grew calmer, she realised a little of the true state of the case, that she was, for a time at

least, deserted, and must think and act alone. Many years seemed to have passed over her head since that bright afternoon at Twalmley; her youth was gone for ever—her health had received a shock which made her tremble lest she should be prostrated suddenly before her work was done—her trust in human love, friendship, honour, was taken from her, as it were in a moment. She must learn now to suffer calmly, to suppress emotion, to endure day by day, or she would not be able to persevere to the end. Her path seemed plain; she was thankful it did; and she would tread it submissively, leaning on the unseen Arm that had guided her through her past life. The place she had held in society she could hold no longer; the shame of the husband's dishonour must rest on the head of the wife; and with it, she neither could nor would mix again with those she had known before. All that was past; what remained now was to do justice, as far as possible, and then hide herself in some obscure corner, where by industry in some honest occupation, she could support herself without burdening any one, or having any eye to look upon her fall.

It crossed her mind several times, whether she should not follow Frederick, and insist, when she found him, on sharing his fate: but as often did the dreadful question return—what if Mr Martock spoke truth? She had told herself, over and over again, that he who had been careless about falsehood to her, would be equally so, when it suited him, to others: but there had been an emphasis in his voice when he uttered those cruel words, that made her feel they were true, in spite of herself. She tried now to face this reality too. He had married her, not out of love, but under the emergency of impending difficulties. He had been wretched in so doing, because he was generous, and knew he was drawing her down with him into misery. And yet, his last words, his last embrace—if he had not at any rate, begun to love her, could they have been so tender, so trustful? Had he not, on the contrary, shown her more love that day than he ever had before? It seemed wonderful to herself, that she could sit and think, and weigh the matter so quietly. She could now understand how people had slept in the intervals of torture, and on the eve of a cruel death. After a certain amount of agony the perception of it became dulled, and a strange familiarity with pain came on, in itself so dreadful, that it took off the terror of each separate phase

of suffering. And she who, a week ago, had thought it a trial to see her bridegroom unequal in spirits, when it was the one drawback in her brilliant lot, could now calmly consider what she was to do, if, while losing everything on earth for his sake, she had failed to win his heart in return.

Calm as she thought herself, there was a burning patch on either cheek when Mrs Tresham visited her the next morning, at which that lady looked mistrustfully, especially when Eleanor requested that a carriage might be sent for, as she had business to transact that admitted of no delay. She did not think her fit for it, and told her so; but was too harassed with her own cares to contest the point long. Mr Tresham kept them in grievous anxiety; his speech was clearer, and he had certainly made progress, but he was in an irritable state of mind that nothing could soothe; insisted on having pencil and paper by the bedside, and wearied himself with going over accounts and calculations in his head, that only confused and distressed him. It was very difficult for his poor wife to speak cheerfully to her guest under these circumstances, but she made the attempt when she saw how shocked she looked at this intelligence; assuring her that he really was better, and that they expected his brother to arrive, who was a good man of business, and would take a great deal off his mind, and be a help to them all. So Mrs Atterbury, having enough to think of in her own private troubles, was not to burden her young shoulders by carrying hers into the bargain.

It would have been as easy to bid her return to the serene existence of Eleanor Ormonde—that favoured being on whom she looked back now with a kind of dreamy admiration, as something quite distinct from herself; but still she felt the considerate kindness, and thought more than once, as she drove along the streets, how many more kind hearts there were in the world than people generally supposed.

In compliance with her request, Clara had procured for her, though with a gentle hint about the expense, the respectable slow one-horse fly, which was their nearest approach to aristocratic splendour, and only employed on solemn occasions. The driver, whose infirmities were veiled by the elaborate respectability of his great coat, 'looking almost like your own coachman,' was rather scandalized, and not a little affronted, by the injunction unexpectedly laid upon him, not to allow any one to get on the box. Sup-



pressing his feelings, however, he only touched his hat in reply ; and in obedience to her directions, drove her to her husband's bank.

She had been there twice before ; the first time with old Mr Atterbury, the second with Sir John, to meet Frederick ; and she could not help remembering how she had then been received, as she now made her way with difficulty through people pushing in and out—almost forbidden to enter by a strange official, keeping guard over the door, and thankful at last to recognise a familiar face in one of the clerks—an elderly man, who had been in the house all his life, and was now helping the assignees with the accounts. On explaining she wished to speak to Mr Jebb, she was allowed to go in, and Mr Jebb, hearing a lady asking for him, came forward directly. He started, as well he might, when she put up her veil.

‘Good Heavens, Mrs Atterbury !’

‘Mr Jebb, I am come on urgent business. Who is the principal person here, and can I see him ?’

She spoke low, but without hesitation ; her thoughts were too absorbed for her to notice that the mention of her name had drawn all eyes upon her, and that whispers were going rapidly round the room. But Mr Jebb saw and heard, and looked anxiously round, expecting Mr Martock or Sir John Pierpoint to appear. ‘No,’ she added, on his muttering something to that effect, ‘I am quite alone, and there is no time to lose. Will you be good enough to help me ?’

‘I would do anything on earth for you, Mrs Atterbury—anything on earth ; but, excuse my asking—had you better do anything here without advice ?’

She had knit her nerves to go through the ordeal, but not to argue about it. ‘I know—I know—but it must be. Pray do not hinder me ; only tell me whom I am to ask for ?’

‘I will see who is within, if you will sit down a minute.’ And he gave her a chair as much under the shelter of his high desk as he could, and hurried through the swing doors. Meanwhile, the report of her presence had spread, and a good deal of curiosity had been excited thereby ; more than one interesting but contradictory story having been set afloat and believed touching her fabulous wealth, and still more fabulous extravagance. Of this she was happily unconscious, for she was thinking of Frederick, not of herself, and when Mr Jebb returned to conduct her to the inner

parlour, where her father-in-law's portrait hung over the fireplace, and where her husband had stood supreme on the hearth when she entered it last—she was not disconcerted even by the presence of three grave, business-like gentlemen, who received her with polite but distant formality. Had she paid this visit a week ago, she would have felt shy and embarrassed, and have done anything rather than be the first to speak; but now all she thought of was what she had to do, and for whom. She did not seem to notice the chair that was offered her, but stood with her hands resting on the table, as her eyes involuntarily turned on the eldest of the three strangers.

‘I do not know, gentlemen, if I am doing anything out of rule in coming here; I am very ignorant in these things, and I hope you will excuse me. I came just to make one plain statement, that may be of service——’

She did not know her breath was so short; she had to stop a moment, and be quite certain she was not going to sob. The three grave faces were turned attentively towards her, and some one again suggested that she should sit down. But she remained in her former position, and went on, her voice trembling, and her lips growing white.

‘You may perhaps be aware that I have an independent fortune, which was so secured by my father as to be entirely at my own disposal. I do not yet know exactly what my own personal liabilities may be, but they must be inconsiderable, and the whole of what is left I wish to place at the disposal of Mr Atterbury's creditors. I came myself to mention this at once, in hopes it might help to calm the public anxiety, and that, if you thought it requisite, I might make the statement in writing. I do not know what is usual, but I am ready to do whatever you will be good enough to point out.’

The gentlemen exchanged glances more than once during this speech, and when she stopped, wondering again why she had such difficulty in breathing, the eldest cleared his throat, and coughed several times before he made any reply. It was a very high-minded, liberal proceeding on the part of Mrs Atterbury; he could assure her he was deeply touched by it, and he believed he was expressing the sentiments of his colleagues when he observed that *her* conduct, at any rate, was beyond praise. The public would be sensible of it, he was convinced. Still, before taking advantage of her gener-

osity, he must, in fairness to herself, ask if she had consulted her friends, or her legal advisers, or had the approval of her husband in this important step? Mrs Atterbury would pardon his reminding her that she was young and inexperienced, and might regret, later in life, having yielded to the enthusiasm of the moment.

She felt, as she had done with Mr Jebb, that she could do anything better than argue; so she only replied, 'Thank you—you are very good,' and wished she was safely back in her fly. Somebody mentioned Mr Martock's name, and the youngest of the three authorities asked if he were not her solicitor?

He had been, but her confidence in him was gone: she was going to consult another that morning.

Pity she had not done so before she came. Might they ask her in what way Mr Martock had forfeited her confidence?

She declined entering into an explanation, beyond the remark that she preferred an adviser who was not a creditor as well.

There was some serious consultation in whispers after this, and a good deal of private discussion with Mr Jebb. The senior authority then addressed Eleanor again, with many civil words of praise and encouragement; and was inclined, on the whole, to think that a written declaration of her liberal intentions might be of value in quieting the resentful passions of the public: after that, he would recommend her losing no time in securing the services of a good solicitor, and acting through him. She agreed, wrote at his dictation the proposal she had verbally made, and then wished them good morning. Mr Jebb offered his arm, the three gentlemen bowed low, and she was safely out of the room. It had not taken long to do, but it was done—thank God!

The outer office seemed full of people; men and women were standing about, some in eager conversation with the clerks, pouring out their wrongs, or trying to extract consolation from their replies; some with vehement gestures and angry faces giving vent to their feelings to each other. All eyes, however, turned on Mrs Atterbury as she came through, and this time she was fully conscious of it. She drew her veil closely over her face, and with bent head and beating heart tried to hurry past, mutterings rising on

either side that nearly took from her the power of exertion.

'Silk dresses! Yes, I could wear silk, if I bought it with other people's money!'

'All very fine to have handsome houses and carriages, and rob people of their all!'

'Hush, hush!—it's not her fault, it is her husband's, and, like a cowardly thief as he is, he sends her where he daren't come himself!'

'Shame! shame! Poor thing!'

This last was from one of those who had lost most, but whose English blood revolted against the idea of insulting an unhappy lady.

'Ah!' was the quick retort of a sharp, lean woman, who, after thirty years' parsimony, had found herself by this failure rather poorer than when she began to save, 'you may say poor thing—and shame too—for shame it is, and she'll find it so, go where she may!'

'There, there, that will do—I can't think why you have all been allowed to come in like this,' said Mr Jebb, angrily, as he pushed on with his charge. 'Do not mind them, Mrs Atterbury—but pray do not think of coming here again. It is not a place for you.'

She would have assented could she have spoken.

'If there is anything I can do to serve you or Mr Frederick in any way, you have only to command me. I should take it as an honour, I should indeed. Ah! what a nuisance! Where are the police, that they let these fellows crowd up the pavement like this? Never mind; you will be out of their reach in a minute.'

But Eleanor recoiled, her heart failing as she perceived an eager, pushing, gaping mob clustered round the entrance, to see her get into her carriage. Encouraged by her companion, the delay was only momentary, but long enough to give them what they wanted—a sight of her face. What their idea was of her share in the bank's failure, it would be hard to define: the cheap papers had been very eloquent on the subject, expatiating on fashionable ladies ruining their husbands by their milliner's bills, and working dress-makers to death without pay; and there was a strong notion among the public outside, that somehow or other she had been helping to spend the money. The public outside not being depositors or creditors, were not angry about it, but

their sense of humour was tickled, and she had to cross the pavement under a brisk fire of sarcasms, chiefly emanating from small boys, but seconded by the laughter of the rest.

‘Don’t mind them, Mrs Atterbury, pray don’t,’ repeated Mr Jebb, when he had placed her in the fly, ‘a parcel of idle scamps, not worth your notice! Where shall I tell the coachman to drive?’

‘Messrs Grove and Shannon, — Street. Thank you for your great kindness. I shall not come here again.’

She shrank into the corner of the carriage as if every eye in the crowd had been a hostile gun, and covered her face with her hands, though she was alone.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### ONE CREDITOR PARDONS.

MR SHANNON was the surviving partner of Mrs Atterbury’s old friend, Mr Groves, and she had known him, more or less, the greater part of her life; chiefly, as an odd-tempered, rough-mannered gentleman, who used to come down into Devonshire when his partner was unwell, and was always a trial to her aunt’s politeness, and her own amiability. He invariably dragged Mrs Mornay into political discussions, in which his vehemence soon left her without a chance; and affronted the young heiress, his client, as much as her sweet temper could be affronted, by as invariably patting her on the head, and asking when she would learn to make a shirt and a pudding? Still, they knew him to be upright, and able in his profession; and it had been against her own will that Eleanor, on his partner’s death, had accepted the services of Mr Martock; a measure which offended Mr Shannon so deeply, he had never seen her since, or taken the least notice of several courteous attempts she had made to sooth his feelings.

He was just coming out of his office as she alighted at the door, and stood, at first, staring at her in blank consternation; then, seizing her arm in his, without saying a word, hurried her into his private room, locked the door,

pushed her into an arm-chair, and had a glass of fiery port at her lips before she had time to breathe. In fact, he was very nearly forcing it down her throat, but she put it back with a shudder.

'A glass of water, if you will be so very kind.'

'Water? We don't know what it means here; this is the nearest approach to it,' pouring out of a dim decanter a tumblerful of flat, lukewarm fluid, which Eleanor drank as if it had been nectar. 'Why, child, what have you been doing to yourself? You look half dead.'

'I feel so.'

'Where have you dropped from? You are supposed to be abroad.'

'I was supposed to be so—it was thought safer. Mr Shannon, you were my friend once.'

'Once! Yes, and a pretty return I got for my friendship, Mrs Frederick Atterbury—remember that!'

'I am afraid you had reason to be displeased; but, indeed, I never meant any disrespect. I could not, for I felt none.'

'Well, well, that is all past and gone, so we will say no more about it. You found wiser advisers, and you were right, I have no doubt. I hope you will find them useful now. You want them, I fancy.'

'I do, indeed—so I came to you.'

'Humph! And pray, what says your great man, Mr Martock, to that?'

'I have not asked his opinion; I shall never ask it again. Tell me at once, will you undertake my affairs, for I have some urgent business that must be done directly.'

'If I do, I am a perjured man, for I swore nothing on earth should ever induce me to do it.'

'I am very sorry—and sorry, too, that I intruded upon you.' She rose as she spoke and was moving to the door, but he stood full in her way.

'What in the world is the matter? What are you taking huff about?'

'You told me, sir, you had sworn——'

'I did; but I didn't tell you I wouldn't break my oath. If I must be perjured, I must. There, sit down again, and be as reasonable as you can. Never let your temper run away with you, especially in business. Keep your head cool and your tongue quiet, as I said to your husband last week,

when he was sitting where you sit now. There! now I have startled you. I ought not to have let it out in such a hurry. My dear little girl, you are not hurt, surely, that the poor young man should run to your old friend in his trouble?’

‘Oh no, no! But I know so little of what he did last week—you have seen him since I did. Tell me everything. What did he say? How did he look?’

‘How did he look? Well, wretched enough to make me almost forgive him. What he said chiefly was, that I was to see after his angel of a wife. Now, if I find you beginning to cry because your name is mentioned, I shall just shut up, and not tell you another word.’

She held him with both hands; she promised to be perfectly still, perfectly passive, if only he would go on. It was a matter of life and death to her now, to know what Frederick had said and done, and he, she was sure, would tell her the truth, and the whole truth, which had been so cruelly kept from her by others. She hurriedly explained how she had been deceived and misled, and by what strange accident she found it out; and owned, that even while convinced Mr Shannon would be her best counsellor, she had had misgivings as to whether her husband would be annoyed, so that to find he had actually chosen him himself, was taking a weight off her mind it sorely needed. But know all she *must*. So then he told her how he had been called out of his bed at four o’clock in the morning—‘I live here, you know—sitting-room here—bed-room above—quite enough for an old bachelor—more rooms if I wanted them, but I don’t’—and had found young Atterbury waiting to see him, in such a state of agitation and distress, that though he had come down intending to tell him he was—never mind what—he had not the heart to do anything but shake hands.

‘He told me he found he must run for it, he hardly knew where; he was tied hand and foot in Martock’s power, as to his affairs, and could only escape by bribing his spies, who watched him night and day. And, as when once he was out of reach you would be less in Martock’s clutches too, he came to entreat me, as your old friend (much good that title had done me, thinks I!), to keep my eyes open, and be ready to help you whenever I saw an opportunity. Perhaps you would come to me, and if you did would I promise to give you my best support, and keep you from being dragged into his ruin? I told him, pretty plainly,

that I should not stir in the matter unless asked by you, and that whatever I did would be for your sake, not his. So then he went on to praise you, bridegroom-like—he had no business to marry you, for all that): but I forget the speeches he made, and I am not going to be at the trouble of inventing any. It does not matter, as he said he should write you a line by his friend Despard.'

'He never did; at least, I never had it. They kept his departure from me, and I would have given anything for a word from himself. Where did he go after all?'

'He hardly knew where he was going, but he thought it would be to California. He had left everything in Martock's hands—his creditors must seize what there was—you were safe, unless your feelings were played upon; and if his strength of sinew earned him daily bread, it was all he should want. I do not myself think he will find it so, but I have often heard young men speak like that, and they believe it at the time. My private opinion is, since you ask me (which she had not done, by the way), that it was the wisest thing he could do; for if he had staid to be badgered in court, and pilloried in the papers, we should have had him in St. Luke's, or with the coroner sitting upon him. Now then, what's the matter? You promised you would keep your head cool, and your tongue quiet—why don't you do it?'

'I will—I will, indeed. Did he say a word about my following him?'

'Following him? No, he was not so mad as that. To tell you the truth, he owned he did not deserve ever to look you in the face again, and I quite agreed with him. What? what? you are off again? Don't, my dear—don't—she had started up, and walked rapidly to the window, as if she did not know what she was about. 'Come and sit down again, and tell me what you want me to do. You say you have urgent business in hand, and marching about in that distracted way won't get it done.'

She suffered him to lead her to her seat, and he drew his chair close to hers. 'Come, think you are telling everything to a cross old uncle, who, after all, cares as much for you as for anybody in the world, and who will do more for you than he would for anybody else; provided, as I said before, you keep your head cool, and your tongue quiet.'

Thus encouraged, Eleanor told him all—all but the doubt



thrown on Frederick's love. Not a word escaped Mr Shannon during her narrative. He took snuff several times, or seemed to do so, though his finger and thumb still held a quantity, that a less experienced person would have considered a handful; and when she paused, he took out his large pocket-handkerchief, and performed a solo with that instrument, as if blowing defiance to a regiment of Martocks, with the Court of Bankruptcy to back them.

'And so you have not come for advice at all, that I can see; but only to give me your instructions?'

'Not quite that; I want your advice in doing this; I am only resolved, and have pledged myself that it shall be done. You will do it for me, I know, without giving me the pain of discussion. I cannot argue just now.'

'My dear, no one in his senses ever wished a woman to argue yet. I know your obstinacy of old in these things (poor Eleanor had never in her life done anything in business on her own responsibility before), and your good respected aunt was just such another—always would have her own way. And as I know you will be doing it yourself, and getting into a peck of troubles if I don't, I must just take the job, and make the best of it. Pray, what do you intend to do meanwhile? You cannot stay sponging on that poor parson, and you shall not get into Sir John's smooth paws again. I tell you what—suppose you come here? I will have a room got ready, and a little maid to wait upon you—or my sisters would come, if you liked it—good creatures both of them, if you are not particular about polish. Not a soul shall touch or come near you without your leave. You don't fancy it? Well, well, just turn it over in your mind, that's all. I'll see and get your things from that house in the City.'

'And will you settle with the person who keeps it? She was very civil to me, and she must think I am out of my mind.'

'Well, she may not be far wrong. Madness shows itself in various ways. Some have a mania for robbing others, and some for pillaging themselves. Of course you are doing an insane thing; but I tell you what—he struck the palm of his hand upon hers with a vehemence that almost numbed her arm—'I would cut my own leg off sooner than take one step to hinder you. I shall be abused by your friends, and perhaps by his, and I shall have a tough round or two with

old Martock, but I don't care. I'll stand by you, and we'll do our best for your Frederick's name. So now let us go into it in a business-like way.'

A long discussion of affairs then took place with which we need not trouble the reader; and after another fruitless attempt to persuade her to accept a shelter in his house they parted good friends. 'Good-bye my dear,' said he, as he put her into her carriage. 'You are not much of a woman of business, but you are an excellent creature, and I'll do anything in the world for you; but remember my words—keep your tongue quiet, and your head cool, and you'll never repent it.'

'A gentleman is waiting to see you, ma'am,' was the greeting Mrs Atterbury received when she entered the parsonage. And before she could decide whether she would be seen or not, the gentleman, prepared, perhaps, for a little doubt on the subject, came out of the parlour where he had been maddening Charles Lyle with his easy conversation, and respectfully but decidedly claimed the privilege of a friend. 'You gave us such terrible anxiety on Saturday, Mrs Atterbury, you must pardon our trying to find out where you were. I am charmed to see you in such good quarters.'

'Mrs Atterbury,' said Charles Lyle, approaching her with a respect quite equal to that of Mr Despard, 'this gentleman claimed the right of asking in person your permission for an interview. If you are not equal to granting it, of course you know that in this house you are exempted from all unwarranted intrusion.'

'Thank you, Mr Lyle. I will so far encroach on Mrs Tresham's kindness as to ask leave to occupy this room for a few minutes: Mr Despard will excuse my detaining him longer. Perhaps you would not mind waiting in the house till then; I may have to ask your advice on something important.'

'There was a sense of protection in the sturdy curate's broad shoulders and sinewy arms, that made her nervously anxious he should not go out of reach. He bowed as he professed himself always at her service, and went up-stairs to relieve the guard on his incumbent.'

Despard stood with a calm smile on his lips, as Eleanor closed the door, and advanced towards him. The change in

her manner and the tone of her address to young Lyle were not lost on so keen an observer.

'You are very angry with me, Mrs Atterbury, and, I must say, with reason.'

'I do not wish to show anger,' she replied, without sitting down, or requesting him to do so. 'You best know how far I have cause.'

'True; no one can know it so well, nor how far your anger might be mollified, if you knew all. But an old friend, Mrs Atterbury, is not to be thrown away in times like these, because he may have made a mistake.'

'Where is my husband's letter, sir?'

'Letter? what letter? Who said he gave me a letter?'

'Have you destroyed it?'

'I—I don't know what you mean, Mrs Atterbury.'

'You know, Mr Despard, that you are telling me an untruth. You would not dare if I were a man!'

He could not have believed those gentle eyes could flash so indignantly, and his own sunk beneath them.

'You are more terrible than ten men, Mrs Atterbury, when you look at me like that.'

'And why am I?' she returned with the eloquence of deep feeling; 'because I trusted you in my distress as my husband's friend; I relied on your honour—I gave myself up frankly to your guidance—I believed your word and you have deceived me. I can neither trust nor believe you now, and you know it.'

He did know it, and, though stung by her words, had that still left in his heart that owned they were just.

'These are not times to be hard in our judgments,' he said, in a low voice, in which there was an unusual tone of humility; 'as in a shipwreck, many things are done which the general hazard makes allowable, so, under pressure like the present, we find ourselves committed, more or less, to proceedings we cannot justify, but which may yet hope for pardon. Atterbury has not fallen so low without pulling his friends part of the way with him.'

'I feared as much, sir; but I can only say, what there is, all will share. You must put in your claim, if you have one with the rest.'

He shrugged his shoulders, with a look that implied a great deal. She seemed resolved against any discussion, for

she turned away, only repeating her former question, 'Where is my husband's letter?'

'When I know what you mean, I may be able to answer you.'

She looked him again in the face, and this time the tears started to her eyes. 'I did not think you had the heart to treat me so!'

'Nor did I!' returned he, impetuously, as he dashed his hand into his coat-pocket, and pulled out a Russia leather case. 'And what is more I can keep it up no longer. There is the letter he gave me for you, just as it came into my hands. No one ever heard from me that I had it, so how you know I cannot tell. There, Mrs Atterbury—and if I might once be allowed to shake hands, I should hope you were trying to forgive me.'

She grasped the letter in one hand, while she allowed him to touch the other, but he could feel no trusting fingers return the pressure of his. It was more as a dismissal than as a token of friendship, and she looked as if she fully expected him to go directly. A sinister expression gathered slowly over his features, relaxed as they had been by momentary remorse, and he stood before her now, resolved that no weakness of his own, no feeble opposition of hers, should again divert him from the object he had in view.

'I must ask you, Mrs Atterbury, to defer reading your letter for a few moments and to allow me to say a very few words—not exactly in defence, but in explanation of my conduct. It is necessary you should know some things which no one can tell you so well as I can; and the time is past when you could safely be kept in ignorance of painful facts.'

'I am ready to hear you, sir,' she replied, declining, by a slight gesture, his mute proposal of a seat. He bit his lip with secret mortification, and there was very little of his ordinary nonchalant ease in his manner as he went on.

'Your husband and I have been friends for some years, and he could tell you that I have done him many a good turn when he wanted it. I have helped him out of many a scrape with his father, in his idle days, and he was fully sensible of the value of such a friend as I was to him—always ready at a call, and sticking at nothing to do him a service. Now, I am not ashamed to own, I am, compara-

tively, a poor man ; I never could keep money when I had it, or help spending it long after it was gone ; and Frederick knew the state of my exchequer even better than I knew his. We were on those terms that it was as natural for me to accept an offer of help from him when he had it in his power, as for him to make it. We entered into some little horse-dealing speculations, and incurred liabilities together, on the understanding, that though chiefly carried on, for his credit's sake, in my name, he would bear me harmless : affairs that could not be laid before the Commissioners of Bankruptcy, for reasons you might not thank me for explaining. I will go further—you set me the example of plain speaking, even were the plainness amounts to severity—the relief he anticipated from your generous affection—he had his revenge, if he wished it, for she shrank and shivered as if he had cut her with a whip—he promised I should share. He knew how much I wanted it, and that it was, in fact, my right ; and if, in that letter he has said nothing to recommend that right to your attention, he is not the man I have believed him to be, and his promise is as worthless as his cheque !

‘Take care, sir. Say all that you have to say, but if you wish me to hear you, let his honour alone. It has been in your keeping too much already. I begin to understand more clearly than you think.’

‘You understand some part, but not all, Mrs Atterbury. Allow me to continue. When I had the honour to escort you to town, I had no purpose but to place you under your husband’s care. He was not trusted to fetch you himself, and that fellow, who dogged us, was sent by Martock to make sure of *me*, who, as it appeared, was not trusted either. This opened my eyes ; I had doubted before, but now I was certain that Martock’s object was to hold him as a hostage, till he had wrung from your fears and tenderness the concessions he required. This was such a dangerous game for Atterbury, that I persuaded him to escape ; and your liberality provided the means. Unluckily, when thoroughly knocked-up with my exertions, I took a glass of wine too much—strange as it may seem at my time of life, and with my habits, I am very easily upset in that way—and I not only exposed myself before you, but let out enough to put Martock on the right scent. He knew my predicament, and traded upon it ; in saving my friend, I had cut away the

planks under my own feet ; and he promised if I would keep it a secret, that I should be relieved from my most urgent liabilities ; those, in fact, in which Atterbury was concerned. In order to keep the secret I was obliged to keep your letter. I hope I have spoken plainly enough now ?’

‘Only too plainly, sir. Mr Martock proposed, of course, to relieve you from the funds he was to obtain from me ?’

‘As part of your husband’s debts, certainly : but I have good reason to believe now he never meant to keep his word. He has had but one object for many years—to amass wealth by every possible means, at everybody’s expense. From the time he first obtained an influence, no matter how, over Frederick’s father, the downfall of his house was as certain as the fate of a bullock in the coils of a boa-constrictor. That it must go sooner or later, we knew some time ago ; but not that it would go so suddenly. That was his doing ; he had held it up for his own ends, and when he thought fit, he gave the signal and all was over.’

‘And knowing this you left me in his hands ?’

‘I did—how could I help it ? But I watched him, and I shall watch him still. No one knows what I do—no one can be of the service to you that I can. If you will take me for what I am—not a paragon of virtue and uprightness, but a man who means well to you and Atterbury at bottom—you may find me a useful ally yet ; and if you are wise, you will ask yourself, whether it is the moment to be hard on old friends, whom it may be uncommonly difficult to replace.’

‘One moment, sir, before I answer that : let me understand you distinctly. To obtain your services what must I do ?’

‘Do, Mrs Atterbury ? Be your own generous self—be what your husband would wish—what he would be himself if he could. A stroke of your pen—I know Martock has taken care you have a large balance at your banker’s—a stroke of your pen will relieve me from such a load as I cannot describe ; for between debts of honour, and speculations, and a rascally lot of tradesmen whose fortunes I have made, I am pretty well run to the wall ; and unless you *do* help me, there is a dreadful temptation in my way, which may bring on consequences for which you are not prepared.’

‘And what sum do you ask ?’

He whispered an amount that made her recoil. There was a slight sound in the room above : by a sudden, uncontrollable impulse, she caught him by the arm and pointed to the ceiling.

‘Do you know who lies up-stairs, and why he lies there now ? Do you know that in this house a good man is on the brink of the grave, brought there by distress of mind at his losses from this bank ; and yet that his wife and daughters have taken me in, and comforted me when they most wanted comfort themselves ? And if I had a right to give thousands to one individual, would it not be to him ? But I have not ; the money is mine no longer ; I give it up to his creditors, that all may have a just share ; if my heart’s blood could be coined for them, they should have that too—but debts of honour, debts incurred in a manner you are ashamed to explain, are nothing to me—I will not hear of them—let the consequences be what they may, let public disgrace and ignominy come upon us—we must bear it or fly from it, or die under it, as God pleases—we cannot buy it off ; we would not if we could, when by so doing we must deepen the injury to others. Now go, Mr Despard. Our last confidence is at an end. I dare not wish my husband had never known you, but I may breathe the hope you may never be on confidential terms again. For one service you have done him—and that I own with thanks—you have helped to bring evils upon him and me that your whole lifetime cannot take away.’

He heard her to the end, but he ground his teeth as he did so ; and the sinister look grew deeper and darker as he took up his hat, and moved to the door. He had really a respect for her, and a general desire for her good opinion ; he admired her more than any woman he knew, as much for her character as for her person ; and it was gall and wormwood to see in what a light she regarded him now. Mingled with a secret desire to bring down her high spirit came a keen perception of her superiority, that kept him silent, when he might have cut her to the heart. She should rue this, and be thankful when he forgave her—but still, he would have given a great deal for one of those trusting looks vouchsafed him before—perhaps, would even have made a sacrifice to deserve it. ‘You are resolved, then,’ he said, as he laid his hand on the lock of the door, ‘to make me your enemy, whether I will or not ?’

'No, indeed. I am too unhappy, too helpless, to wish for the enmity of any one. I have quite enough to shake the courage of a braver heart than mine. But this I will say, Mr Despard—I fear you less as an open enemy than as a false friend; for as the one, you could only injure me yourself—as the other, you would lead me to injure others.'

He pulled his hat over his brows, and walked away, slamming the door behind him in utter oblivion of the invalid: and not till he was gone did it occur to her to wonder how it was he had discovered she was there?

Even that wonder was soon forgotten in the absorbing perusal of her letter, which she hurried to her own room to open.

'Eleanor,' it ran, 'my own injured, angel wife! by this time you know me better, and if you have not learned to hate me yet you soon will. I leave you in difficulty and distress, because I find it is the only way of not increasing it tenfold. When I am out of reach, they will have less hold on you. Trust neither Martock nor Pierpoint—go to your old lawyer Shannon, and let him act for you. I cannot see you ruined, and I will not. It is enough that I have destroyed all your happiness. If you knew what I have gone through, you would own I have had my reward. God guard and bless you! I still say as I did when we parted—my last, my only hope, in this world or the next, is in your loving me in spite of all. 'F. A.'

'In spite of all!' How much those words implied! How little he knew when he wrote them, the amount of meaning they would convey!

Poor Eleanor! She was a mere woman, and full of inconsistencies; and all his faults and all her wrongs had not altered the fact that on this fallen, ruined, dishonoured man she had poured the whole treasury of her heart's best love; and how could she help pressing his letter to her lips, to her bosom,—revelling in every touch of tenderness,—and finding in every sentence something on which to build a hope—something to make him dearer than ever? The cruelty that had kept this precious thing from her so long was overlooked in the joy of possession; and she was still gazing on the handwriting, and weighing it word by word, when Mrs Tresham came into her room, more than usually agitated.



Charles Lyle, good fellow as he was, had been off his guard ; and on the invalid observing he heard a strange voice, and the loud shutting of a door, and insisting on knowing who was come—they were in perpetual fear of their eldest boy rushing in upon them as soon as he received the bad news—had replied, it was only a visitor to Mrs Atterbury. He saw in a minute the mischief he had done, but it was then too late, for nothing they could say or do would satisfy Mr Tresham, but he must see and speak to her himself.

Eleanor looked at her in speechless terror : she would rather have faced that jeering crowd again, than appear before her husband's injured friend. Her brain began to swim, and her temples to beat wildly. Mrs Tresham put her hand encouragingly on hers.

'I am afraid it will be a great trial to you—but what can I do ? He is in that state in which the smallest irritation may be fatal, and I dare not oppose for fear of exciting him. You will see him altered, my dear ; you are prepared for that.'

'Altered ?' said Eleanor, as she slowly rose from her seat, 'which of us is not altered ?—and yet it is not so very long ago, when one thinks of it. We did not expect all this in May, did we ?'

'No, indeed, my poor girl. God comfort us all ! Come, take my arm. I am the stronger of the two ; but then I have seen more sorrow than you have.'

'Have you ? Yes, I suppose you have. I was happy last Monday—at least, I think so. A week is not much, and yet one may lose a great deal in it. Do you know all I have lost ?'

'No ; but I know what you have still—the regard and sympathy of your friends. Come, come—be brave for five minutes. I must not keep him waiting.'

She spoke more bravely than she felt, for the manner of her guest gave her not a little uneasiness. 'You can command yourself, my dear, can you not ?' she added after a pause. 'He is *very* ill, remember.'

'Yes, so they told me when I came to the door, and it is our doing. He looked so kindly at me when I saw him last—will he ever do so again ?'

'Have you received so much unkindness from us, that you need fear it now ?'

'No, no,' she replied, convulsively locking her fingers to-

gether, and pressing them to her head, 'it is not your unkindness I am afraid of. "Oh, Mrs Tresham, I cannot see him—I cannot!"

Mrs Tresham saw it was time to take a decided tone. 'You must, my dear. Should I ask you if I durst refuse him anything? Think a minute: I would do, I have done, all I could for your comfort—will you do nothing for mine?'

The mild reproach had the desired effect. Eleanor put her hand into her friend's arm, and without further resistance accompanied her to the sick man's chamber.

She was prepared for an altered face, but all her resolutions did not prevent her starting at the first sight of the drawn, contracted features, and dim, haggard eyes that turned on her as she approached, with an effort to smile, more painful to witness than a frown. A strong exertion of self-control kept her from rushing out of the room, but that was all she could do, and she stood leaning on Mrs Tresham's arm, trembling from head to foot.

'Here she is, dear William: you may just shake hands with her, and make her welcome, and then I must take her away again, for she is not very well. Sit down by him, my dear, and then he need not move his head.'

Eleanor obeyed, and silently took the nerveless fingers in hers. He lay looking at her for a few minutes, before murmuring in pitying accents, 'No wonder! no wonder! Poor young thing!'

His voice was so altered, and so indistinct, Eleanor hardly recognized it; but conscious of Mrs Tresham's anxious eye, she exerted herself to ask if he was better?

'Better? Well, I suppose so. I can use one hand, you see, to welcome you. A poor reception for a bride, Miss Ormonde; but it was very good of you to come to us.'

'Yes, was it not?' put in his wife. 'I knew you would say so, and now she will believe me. Shall she go now, and come in again another time?'

'No—I must speak to her alone.'

Eleanor looked up in consternation. Mrs Tresham seemed in grievous perplexity and distress.

'I wish to speak to Miss Ormonde—to Frederick's wife, alone, Maria. Don't make me argue about it, love; only shut the door when you go out.'

'Yes, dearest, if you wish it; but, for all our sakes, be calm, and do not talk to agitate yourself. There, I am going

directly—she will stay with you. Only remember, William, she is far from strong’—she knew this appeal would have more effect than the other—‘and so I can allow you a very few minutes.’

She passed her hand over Eleanor’s hair; by a gentle pressure of her fingers reminded her of the necessity of caution, and then, with a heavy sigh, withdrew.

He groaned as the door closed upon her, and turning wearily on his pillow, muttered the questions that had been maddening his shattered nerves ever since the fatal stroke—‘What will become of them when I am gone?’

‘But you are better, dear sir—I am sure you are. God is too merciful—you will live many years, I hope and trust.’

He shook his head with a faint, bitter smile. ‘A man generally knows when he gets his death-blow. I have had mine, but that would not trouble me, were it not for them. My income dies with me—I am insured for a very small amount—my boy at Cambridge is a great expense, poor fellow; Clara was to be married next year—they will not have seventy pounds a year among them. What will they do?’

She could say nothing to comfort him; her head drooped on her bosom.

‘I grow confused,’ he went on; ‘I say things indistinctly, and talk nonsense sometimes—you must bear with me. I want to ask if you will be a friend to the girls when I am gone. They must work, I know; but a friend like yourself can help them in the world in many ways—recommending them and so forth. I am sure you will do what you can, will you not?’

She felt as if he was mocking her misery. She, who believed herself degraded from her own position, to be asked to assist others! Her silence seemed to perplex him; he turned his eyes again upon her face, and looked at her with a long wistful earnestness, as if to penetrate her heart. Desperation from suffering gave her nerve to meet the look, and return it steadfastly; but still she did not speak.

‘Is it asking too much?’ he said, at last.

‘It is asking what is impossible.’ The bitterness of the words was disguised by the sad humility with which they were spoken.

‘They have not hurt your feelings, I hope, have they? Girls are thoughtless, you know; but they mean kindly, I am sure of that.’

'They behave kindly, very kindly. You are all too good to me.'

'Then why will you not be their friend, when they will want one so much?'

'I shall love them all my life, and never forget their conduct, never: but, dear sir, I am poorer than they will be, and I have a shame to bear that they will never have. I am not fit to be their friend.'

There was a sudden gleam in his sunken eyes. 'It is so then—he robbed you first, and then deserted you? Oh, shame on him—shame on him! that is past pardon!'

'Oh no, sir—do not say such things—do not think them. He has not touched a farthing of mine—he fled sooner than touch it; it is all my own doing, of my own free will. I have given up all I have; it was honestly mine no longer, so there is no merit in that, and it will help to lessen the loss to others.'

'And you have stripped yourself of everything?'

'No—I have enough to keep me till I can get employment, somewhere out of everybody's sight. Do not think about me—I shall do very well.'

Again he looked wistfully at her, but this time with deep compassion.

'I knew I could not be mistaken in that face; I saw the heart in the eyes; but, my child, this must not be—you must be protected—you must have advice—I wish I could see about it for you, but I am helpless—I can do nothing. I must speak to my wife. What is to become of you if you give up your all?'

'What would become of others if I did not? And what good would any money do me now? You say you have had your death-blow—what do you suppose is mine?'

'Ay, poor girl, I see it; but take comfort—you are young enough to live over this trial, and it may all be made up to you, even here; only do not flinch in your duty—whoever else forsakes your husband, do not *you*.'

She clasped her hand with a thrill of gratitude.

'God bless you for saying that—I should not have dared to hope *you* would speak for him!'

His face grew agitated with sudden emotion. 'I loved him from a boy; his father was my oldest friend—I would as soon have doubted my own brother as either of them, and they have broken my heart; but still I say to you—when

you were made Frederick's wife, it was that he might be saved. Never let go that hope, even though you see no means now of doing it: hold it fast as if it were your life, and pray—pray—pray——'

His voice grew almost inaudible, and a weary look passed over his features; he stretched out his hand feebly towards her, and, as she sank on her knees, laid it on her head with a murmured benediction. She could restrain herself no longer; the tears streamed down her cheeks as she lifted her folded hands in entreaty. 'Not me only—not me only! Have you but one blessing, dear Mr Tresham? You blessed us last together—do not divide us now. One word, one look, of blessing—of pardon for *him*!'

His hand again pressed her head—pressed it with an energy she never forgot—and his lips moved slowly; but what he would have said, she could not tell. She only knew that a sensation of peace and comfort, that had seemed lost for ever, was stealing into her heart, and gladly would she have knelt there longer, as in a sanctuary; but Mrs Tresham, who had been in a fever of anxiety all this time, came in to summon her away. Her first glance was at the invalid, and she was alarmed at his exhausted appearance.

'He is sadly tired, my dear. Can you help me raise him while I arrange his pillows? and then he must rest all day.'

They were just in the act of supporting him, when a bustle in the passage, a hasty step at the door and a voice in passionate remonstrance, made him bound in his bed, and raise himself almost upright. His wife knowing the danger, flew to arrest the new comer, but it was too late. A young man, flushed, heated, half mad with excitement, rushed into the room, and flung himself half across the bed.

'Oh, father, dear, dear father!—if I had only known—such an idiot as I have been!—can you ever forgive me? I shall never forgive myself!'

'Herbert, dearest—pray don't, implored his mother; 'he must not be excited. Come away till you are more composed.'

'I cannot be composed till I have told him everything. He must not forgive me till he knows what I have done. I have been almost mad ever since I heard of all this. Father, I have broken my word to you—I did not dare to tell you before, and that was one reason why I could not bear to be at home this vacation—I have been wicked enough to get into

debt again, and now, instead of being able to help you all, I am more miserable than any of you ! Oh, if I had only known !'

Yes, if we could always know what could be the result of self-indulgence, and egotism, and neglect of duty, how different they would appear ! Idle expenses, of which he had thought so little when he believed his father had the means of covering them, now wore the semblance of deliberate robbery of his family ; and the confessions that, notwithstanding all his mother's endeavours, he poured out in his agony of remorse, were mingled with fierce imprecations on that unlooked-for villany that had made a villain of him !

His father's working countenance must have warned him of the risk he ran, had he been calm enough to observe it ; but it was not till his passion had spent itself, that he could either see or hear. At last, however, his voice became choked with sobs, as he fell on his knees by the bedside, the stiffening lips that had warned, and persuaded, and entreated so often, but had never given one severe word, made an effort on his behalf that they could hardly have made for another.

'Herbert—I have pardoned all—all. Help your mother and sisters—and forgive, as I do——'

His head fell back on the pillow Eleanor was still sustaining, and his eyes gave her one kind look. It was the last in which the gentle spirit found utterance on earth ; for the next moment he was seized with a return of his attack, more severe than the first ; and though he lived some hours after, he was never conscious again.

Such scenes are sacred ; we will not attempt to describe them.

As soon as the widow was able to think the next morning, she thought of her unhappy guest. She had a dim recollection of her presence with them to the last, and of having seen her rush from the room when all was over ; and she reproached herself with having forgotten her, even for a time. As kind a message as she could frame she sent her by Clara ; and Clara carried it willingly, for she too had seen that retreat from the death-bed, and had shuddered, even in her own grief, at the expression of her face. But when she entered her room, she found it vacant. The bed had not been slept in ; her few possessions were gone, and a note lay on the table, blurred and blotted with tears.

It implored their merciful forbearance, thanked them for all they had done, and entreated no one to inquire after her, as she could not face them now. A beautiful turquoise ring was enclosed, with an entreaty, almost humbly worded, that Clara would accept it, for the sake of one whom she had comforted and whom she would see no more.

They did inquire, however, as soon as they were able; anxiously endeavoured to trace her retreat, but in vain. Others, as anxious as they, though for very different reasons, laboured zealously in the same cause, with no better success. It was certain that Mr Shannon knew where she was, for he carried on her affairs, and was engaged in a deadly warfare with Mr Martock in consequence; but it was to no purpose that he was watched, cross-questioned, and bullied. No clue was afforded by which she could be traced; and when, soon after, an advertisement appeared in the papers, announcing that Frederick Atterbury had absconded, and offering a large sum for his apprehension, it was no matter of surprise that his unfortunate wife should have fled into obscurity. Still the uncertainty of her fate, and the surrender of her fortune, which was largely commented upon in the papers, caused no small excitement and uneasiness among her friends, and gave her acquaintance a great deal to talk and conjecture about. To the credit of human nature, it may be safely said, there were few among them who would not have been willing, at least for a time, to shelter and assist the innocent woman, of whom, even in the height of her prosperity, no one had been able to speak an evil word. But months slipped away, affairs went on in their melancholy course—their house and all their property were disposed of—their servants were paid off, and by degrees she began to be forgotten. Nothing was heard of Atterbury's fate, and, but for the occasional report of meetings and investigations that appeared in the papers, he would have been forgotten also by such of the public as had too much cause to keep him in mind.

## CHAPTER XVII

## SEA-SIDE ACQUAINTANCE.

THE war was over. The Constitution of England—in the memorable words of one of her greatest men, whom it was the fashion at that time to criticise with a severity atoned for since by a nation's tears—had been on its trial; and, considering all things, had come through it pretty well. The system of abusing oneself, and all one's belongings—of telling all the world every time a blunder was made, and scolding and rating everybody who ought to have prevented it, and who would have been just as much scolded and rated if they had taken measures *to* prevent it—had on the whole, proved successful; for the simple reason that a vigorous amendment went on at the same time. Other parties, more discreet, had meanwhile been keeping up a very fair show, and persuading the world in general that all was progressing on velvet; but, in reality, both the autocratic opponent and the absolute ally had come to the conclusion that you may have too much of a good thing; and while England was fresher and stronger than at the beginning of the war, France and Russia had had enough. So a Peace was made up with great solemnity, and much self-glorification on the ally's part, and rather a sullen acquiescence on ours—the nation little knowing that a merciful hand was staying her in her full strength, that she might be ready for another undreamed of struggle glooming in the horizon.

The Peace was made, and solemnized with an unlimited allowance of fireworks, and London walked about all night to do it honour, and wives and mothers were glad at heart that the gunpowder should be so harmlessly expended. And people were growing more lenient about commissariat mistakes and ambulatory short-comings; and the Balaklava railway was being pulled up, and the Crimean stores sold half price, and young ladies left off knitting comforters and making lint, and planning how to get leave to start for Smyrna and Scutari, to show the nurses a thing or two not dreamed of in their philosophy.

Not all that England could say or do, or feel, however, could call back her dead to life, or give to some of her living



what they had lost for her sake, and in her despite. Arthur Sydney had learnt by this time that it was hopeless to think of any more service; his work in the field was done; and if he could crawl and creep on in the world a few years more, it was as much as he could look for. So, as one who had received his orders, and knew they must be obeyed, he submitted without complaint to be an invalid for the rest of his days; and whatever he might feel he kept to himself. A year had passed since he went to Lawleigh, and, as Uncle Rupert had foreseen, the more they became acquainted the more reluctant they had all been to part; and the two families were now as completely one as if they had known each other all their lives—perhaps more so. Arthur's health was their first consideration, and his doctor having ordered him sea air and warm baths, the party, whom we last saw in Westminster, established themselves, just a twelvemonth later, in a small retired watering-place, chosen because it *was* small and retired, as Arthur had no fancy for being paraded in his chair among a crowd of people. It was cheap clean, might be called dull by those who were particular, for there was certainly not much to do, or to see, but it suited our friends, who had each, in his or her previous career, learned to be more or less independent of outward matters for occupation and amusement.

Circumstances had begun to improve with the house of Clavering, when Rupert started homewards; and having once begun, had continued to do so with great increase of rapidity. Some speculations in land, which had in his first years of exile appeared a dead loss, had proved a source of considerable profit; indeed, from the hour he left Australia, all his property there had been augmenting in value, and he had ample reason for the exultation with which he rubbed his spectacles over his partner's accounts, and repeated, 'My Anne is an heiress after all!'

Anne was, in fact, in possession already. She was to have everything she wished for, to do everything she liked; and if ever a young lady was in a fair way of being spoiled by indulgence it was Miss Clavering of Lawleigh. She could do no wrong; every suggestion was wise, every whim was original. If she looked grave, they were all on the stretch to find out what had vexed her; when she smiled again, they were grateful to her for being happy; and if she had requested Mrs Sydney to go out shooting, and Uncle Rupert to learn

*broderie*, it is most probable they would have tried. And as, happily, she was too affectionate to grow tyrannical, these excellent people were not punished as indulgence generally deserves. But there was one thing all their love and devotedness could not do—they could not give her good and even spirits. Freed from the heavy domestic duties that had formerly filled up her time, without having regular ones to take their place, her imperfect education tending to make her desultory in whatever intellectual pursuit she attempted, and to dishearten her with a constant sense of rudimental ignorance, she often found the hours hang heavily on her hands, took a disgust to everything she had to do, and, in consequence was unhappy. The forbidden past was then always at hand to add to her self-torment; and the old wrong and the gnawing resentment would start up and possess her spirits before she was aware, only to be laid after a bitter struggle, and by the help of the considerate tenderness of those around her. Attendance on Sydney was, perhaps, her best remedy; for his patient good-humour made her ashamed of her own discontent, and she was never more gentle and subdued than after one of these stormy passages, when she had gradually come to the conviction that her own faults were greater than anybody's. When she felt she needed forgiveness, then she could forgive—and the dark cloud rolled away.

They were all grouped together, one hot afternoon, under the shelter of a favourite rock, where Arthur's chair was often drawn at his own request, and where Anne built a seat for Mrs Sydney with shawls and cloaks; and Uncle Rupert, with his book and telescope, professed to be very studious and seamanlike at one and the same time, but was, in truth, as idle as possible. It was a day that encouraged idleness—gave it the semblance of a virtue; just sea-breeze enough to lull you to repose, with a general aspect of laziness about everything; about the flag at the preventive station, which was constantly waking up for a stretch, and then subsiding again luxuriously; about the fishing-boats at anchor, rocking mildly on the water as if they were each the cradle of a son and heir; about the very crabs who were left by the tide, and might have known they had not much time to lose if they meant to overtake it, but who seemed to think life and liberty and salt water were really not worth the trouble of running sideways for in such weather! Conversation

had dropped almost entirely—so had Mrs Sydney's knitting pins, whose speed had been gradually slackening some time. Uncle Rupert's book had taken it into its head to keep slipping off his knees, making him start up every now and then, open it at a fresh place, and look round with a serious expression of countenance, as if to imply how hurt he would be if anybody imagined he had been asleep. Arthur, who seldom enjoyed enough ease of body to know what this Elysian lassitude meant, was the only one whose eyes were on the alert, and he it was who first perceived two figures coming towards them along the beach—figures whose outline was quite enough to dispel the notion of any one of the party being in danger of resting too long.

'Hunted down at last!' he said to himself, unable to help smiling at what he foresaw. 'What a nose the woman has! She would be worth any money on four legs, whatever she may be on two. When we thought we had been so very clever, and yet so very civil in declining her kind offer of coming to Lawleigh, by saying we were all going to the sea, without mentioning where—here she is after us, as if we had fixed the day and hour. I declare there is something very fine in a mind that can put two and two together like that. I say, Mr Clavering, wake up; the enemy is upon us, and here are we outside the trenches.'

'Ay, ay, Arthur; you don't say so? I was not asleep.' And Mr Clavering rubbed his telescope vigorously, and began sweeping the horizon as if for a hostile fleet.

'Like many wise men, sir, you are looking in the offing for enemies while they are running in under your nose. Look to the left for one minute.'

Uncle Rupert looked as described, and shut up his telescope with significant energy. 'Out-mancœuvred, as surely as Salamanca was won! We ought to be ashamed of ourselves; all we can do now is to form square to receive cavalry. Mrs Sydney, my dear madam, will you be good enough to fall in?'

'Fall in! Where?' asked Mrs Sydney, waking up in turn with a start of alarm.

'Ah, it is too late now, granny; we must receive them in line, as we did under Sir Colin; but I expect they'll double us up with their rush. Look now! Don't you know who that is coming right down upon us?'

'Dear me, if it were not so very unlikely, I should say

it was dear Millicent Cummings and my little god-daughter.'

'And it is just because it is so very unlikely, granny, that it must be Cousin Millicent, and no other. How attentive she is, is not she?'

'Very much so, indeed, my dear—very. I only hope it will not be too exciting for you, talking to her. You must keep quiet; do, there's a darling. She will not stay long, I dare say.'

'You dare a great deal more than I would, granny. My only hope is in Miss Clavering. If she will be true to herself and us, we may hold our own yet.'

Miss Clavering, who scented a battle afar off, threw up her head, and looked prepared for action. Uncle Rupert, meanwhile, advanced a few paces so as to meet the new comers before they could reach Arthur's chair, and the old lady, taking the hint, planted herself devotedly by his side. A fervent ejaculation of delighted surprise was heard before the parties met, and directly after Mrs Cummings was shaking hands with one, and embracing the other, in the most affectionate manner possible.

'To think of my lighting upon *you*, dearest aunt, in this little place, when I only came just to find a quiet, healthy little corner for my poor Milly, as the scarletina has broken out in her school, and I dare not take her home to her sisters! You are none of you nervous about infection, I dare say. It is only for very young people I am timid myself. Come and kiss your aunt Sidney, Milly. She is a little shy, and not so accustomed to society as her sisters, of course, but you will excuse that. And how is our hero? Milly has so longed to have a talk with him, and hear his adventures. And how are you, my dear Mr Clavering? and I declare there is sweet Miss Clavering too. I need not ask how *she* is, with that bloom. Let me introduce my youngest daughter to you, Miss Clavering. How delightful it is that we should just have happened to meet when we least expected it!'

The delight seemed to be all her own: her daughter, a heavy-browed, square-built girl of thirteen, stood with a sulky look of indifference, as if it were all part of a tiresome lesson; Mrs Sydney, in her gentle way, tried to respond to the warmth of her niece's greeting, but was too nervous about the effect on Arthur to be as happy as she felt she ought to be; Rupert Clavering was polite, and Anne was gracious, because it was due to themselves so to be; and

Arthur himself was undecided whether he was vexed or diverted. But Mrs Cummings did not require to be much seconded; she had satisfaction enough for the whole party; and, as soon as she had secured the best seat and the softest shawls for herself, was only anxious that everybody should be assured she was perfectly comfortable.

'We have secured a sweet little lodging,' she exclaimed, 'for dear Milly and my own maid, where they will be nicely taken care of, and enjoy the fine air, and live for next to nothing. The woman of the house cooks for them, and provisions are cheap, and of course they will only require plain food; it is wholesomer for Milly while she is in quarantine. Yes, it is, my love; the doctor said so. It is no use your shaking your little head at me like that. If he did not actually use the words, he implied them. Well, my dear aunt, and how do you like the sea? I remember when you could never endure it; so to tell you the truth, I was quite surprised to hear what you meant to do.'

'Do not you know yet, Cousin Millicent,' said Sydney, 'that granny will endure anything that is to do anybody else good? She came here on my account, as she used to go to balls on yours.'

'My dear boy, I like being here very much. I really do. And I liked the balls, too, as Millicent knows. It was as great a pleasure to me to take her in those days as it was to her to go.'

'Ah!' sighed Mrs Cummings, '*my* days of pleasure have long been over. I only go out now as a matter of duty to my dear girls, and I can only do so by care and prudent management. Of course it is an additional expense giving Milly this treat; but it is for health's sake, and therefore I must stretch a point if I retrench in some other way afterwards. I am rewarded for it already by meeting you all here. How charming this is!' suppressing a great yawn. 'I could spend months by the sea, and never be tired of its beauty. Nature is so superior to the glitter of the world. Oh!'—with a scream and a start—'what horrid creature was that running over me? Oh! and there's another. My dearest aunt, I cannot bear this; you don't know how foolishly nervous I am about live things. It is very weak and wrong, but my nerves are not what they were, and a straw upsets them, just when I am least prepared. Do let me persuade you all to come off this broiling beach, and I will

show you our lodgings. I thought I saw your servant here, Mr Clavering, didn't I? Oh, there he is. Here!' beckoning eagerly to Adam, who came lounging forwards with his long easy stride; 'will you be so good as to wheel Captain Sydney's chair up the slope, and we will follow? Thank you. Come, aunt,' drawing her arm in hers, 'it seems a long time since we were together, and now I have got you, we will see as much of each other as we can.'

No resistance was offered: the allies made comical gestures to each other in private, testifying to their sense of being disgracefully beaten; but the brilliancy of the enemy's tactics had so thoroughly broken their line of battle, there was nothing for it but to yield for the moment. The Claverings hung behind, and while Mrs Sydney listened meekly to her niece, Arthur began making friends with his young cousin.

'So you wanted to have a talk with me, did you, Milly?'

'No, I didn't.'

'Your mamma said so, and I flattered myself it was true.'

'Mamma often says I want to do things when I don't.'

'Oh! Perhaps you do not like coming to the sea, then?'

'I hate it.'

'Hate the sea? You are too plucky a girl to be afraid of bathing.'

'I don't mind that; but I hate coming to a poky cheap lodging, with no one to speak to, just because two girls had the scarletina at school. And it is not because of them either; that is all make-believe, I know.'

'What is it for, then?'

'It is just to get me out of the way, to cost nothing, while they all go off to some nice amusing place, and ride, and go out and enjoy themselves. It is a horrid shame, and I mean to tell everybody what I think.'

'No, no, you will not. You are much too amiable and well bred. You will tell everybody you meet that you are delighted you came, because you have found your Cousin Arthur, and he is so agreeable, that he makes up for everything!'

'No, I shan't. I don't think you will at all.'

'Yes, yes, I shall. Wait a bit, and you will see. An hour of my company is worth a dozen rides.'

'That is as people think.'

'I know it, and *you* will think so presently. You have no idea how charming I can be to a nice, good-natured cousin.'

'But I am not nice, and very ill-natured.'

'Oh, you are quite mistaken, I assure you. You have a great deal to learn, I see that. I must take you in hand; and when you have admired *me* properly, you will begin to appreciate yourself. We shall be the best friends in the world. Now show me your lodgings.'

'Up that turning; in that little house. The first floor.'

'Capital. Then I can be wheeled here, and sit and whistle to you to look at me from the window. I shall come every day, Have you got a piano?'

'No; there is a person in the parlour who has one, and is to give me lessons. Such a nuisance!'

'Better and better. Then you must make the lady leave the window open, and I shall sit outside and hear you play. I am sure you play very well.'

'No, I always blunder and stumble, and detest the whole thing.'

'You will be quite different when you play to me. Ladies always are. There! some one is playing now. Is that your teacher?'

'Yes; she is constantly *dinging* away at that wretched piano.'

'Not at all wretched; it is a very fair instrument, and the lady knows what she is about. We will wait here and criticise her till the others come up.'

They had some little time to wait, for Mrs Cummings had many things to say to her aunt in private, and kept her behind for the purpose; and the Claverings timed their pace by hers. But Arthur showed no impatience as long as the piano went on; he lay back in his chair, with his eyes half shut, and listened with an air of placid content, strongly in contrast with Milly's half-peevish, half-puzzled face, and the dark and demure features of his attendant. When the music stopped, he roused himself, and gave a long shrill whistle, that soon brought Uncle Rupert to his side. The whole party were presently collected round his chair, and some apology was made for his being kept waiting.

'I have been very happy, I assure you. A lady has been playing such a pretty piece, all over the piano at once. I wish she would begin it again. I have not had such a treat

for years. Miss Clavering, cannot we make her acquaintance, and invite her to tea, and make her play all night. You can do anything.'

'I would do anything to give you pleasure, I am sure. What am I to do? To walk in, and carry her off, piano and all?'

'No, pray,' put in Mrs Cummings, 'I beg you will not, or poor Milly will lose her lessons. The lady is professional, and I have arranged that Milly shall learn of her while she is here. Her terms are very moderate.'

'Or I shouldn't have the lessons,' whispered Milly to Arthur.

'Then if she is professional, one can ask her out to play without scruple. Mind, Milly, I shall sit here every day while you are practising, and whenever I whistle, I shall expect you to look out of the window.'

Milly did not say she would not; she looked more good-humoured than she had for many a day; and while the ladies went in to pass judgment on the apartments, remained of her own accord to chat with her cousin. It was so new to be talked to in this way by an officer like Arthur; her little heart was all in a pleasing flutter, that did more to loosen the crust of envy and discontent than probably the best advice could have done in so short a time.

Meanwhile the performer had recommenced her labours, and was working diligently through a brilliant arrangement of operatic airs. Arthur listened as if he could never have enough, and Rupert Clavering, struck with his look of enjoyment, began revolving plans for securing him as much of it as possible.

'Do you know, my dear, if that lady ever goes to play at private houses?'

'I am sure she doesn't. She told mamma she never went anywhere. Her pupils come to her. They had a long talk before they arranged anything—at least, mamma talked immensely. She always beats people's prices down, and the woman agreed at last, I do believe, because she was tired of it.'

It seemed that Milly had spoken a little too loud, for her mother's head was shaking angrily at her from the first floor, at the same moment that a lady appeared at the parlour-window, and with some little difficulty shut it down.

'There!' said Sydney, 'we are compelling that poor lady



to stifle herself. This will never do. Shove on a few steps, Adam. Was that your teacher, Milly ?'

'Yes, that was her,' said ungrammatical Milly.

'Well, I must say you have shown your good taste in the selection.'

'I didn't choose her. I didn't want to have lessons in the holidays. I hate all teachers—perfectly detest them.'

'No, you don't. I mean to teach you a great many things, and I defy you to detest *me*.'

'But then you are different ; one does not detest one's cousins, you know. Not always.'

'Not always. We make exceptions in each other's favour. But do not you think your teacher very pretty ?'

'No, I hardly looked at her. I shall have enough of her when I go to take my lesson. If she is at all strict, I shall soon give her enough of *me*, too. One can always tire out a teacher, that is one comfort.'

Rupert Clavering turned round upon her with a look of grave astonishment.

'I am sure, my dear, you are too kind a little girl to try and tire a lady who takes pains to teach you.'

'Little girl !' Miss Milly's under lip pouted with all the scorn of thirteen ; she turned a sulky shoulder to the speaker, and walked on in dignified silence till they reached the lodgings of the Lawleigh party. Mrs Cummings properly pressed, had consented to join their early tea—a substantial meal, in which Uncle Rupert delighted—and spent the evening with them ; and in return for their hospitality, gave them a great deal of her personal experience in the difficult art of making a handsome appearance with strict regard to economy

'It is in little things, Miss Clavering—may I trouble you for some more of that delicious cream ?—in little trifling matters that no one thinks of, that a good manager finds so many resources. If you are always on the watch, it is wonderful how much you may save in making a bargain, or coming to an arrangement ! Then, by keeping your eye always on your servants, and not allowing a single thing that is not absolutely necessary, and at the very lowest price, you save enough to cover more of the expenses of the season's entertainments than you would imagine. I believe I may safely say no one keeps servants more cheaply than I do, and they are all the happier for not being pampered. I

hate the very sight of lazy, greedy servants, who think of nothing but eating and drinking. Thank you, Mr Clavering ; that lobster salad really does look too tempting to refuse. It is not often I touch such things, but this once——Well, dear aunt, as I was telling you just now, I got those lodgings on lower terms than the woman asked at first, by just settling about it in the right way. And the music-lessons for Milly—I believe they are to be a third less than Mrs Mornay receives from her other pupils, because I told her positively I could not afford to give more. People soon find out when you are determined, and it generally ends in their giving in.'

'But supposing the teacher could not afford to take less—how then?' asked Miss Clavering.

'Oh, that is her own affair entirely. I put it to her quite plainly. I told her how I was circumstanced, and that after the heavy losses I had sustained I could not pay the exorbitant salaries others might, who had not been robbed ; but I could insure her good recommendations if she did justice to Milly's talent. So, like a sensible young woman, she told me she would teach her for whatever I pleased.'

'And you expect her to be well taught on those terms?'

'Of course I do ; and, by the way, dear Miss Clavering, when I am not here, I wonder if it would be asking too much if I begged you, now and then, to look in at one of the lessons, and ascertain that Mrs Mornay really is doing her duty by the child. Those people are never to be depended upon when your eye is off them for a minute, and I should be very glad she should feel there is a check upon her in my absence.'

'Very likely,' said Anne ; 'but I am so poor a musician myself, I should not know whether she was teaching well or ill, and certainly should not think of telling her.'

'Cannot you contrive to stay here, Millicent?' asked Mrs Sydney, 'and then you could judge for yourself, you know.'

'Of course, I should prefer that, aunt, and with you all, nothing could be more charming ; but my girls at home must not be left. Their health requires change, and I believe it will be expedient to take them for a little while abroad. A few weeks on the Rhine, or in Switzerland, and a day or two in Paris, will do them a world of good in mind and body ; and I must contrive it, even if we have to retrench in some other way.'

'That means *me*,' growled Milly to Arthur, with her usual perspicuity of language; 'I am the other way, always.'

'But, my dear,' argued Mrs Sydney, 'the scarletina—are you not a little nervous about leaving that dear child with only her maid? Suppose she were to be taken ill?'

'Oh, dear aunt, I have perfect confidence in Derrick; she will take every care of her. Milly is quite well on the whole, and if she only lives carefully and plainly, I have no fear. And then your being here is such a comfort! I can leave her so safely, knowing you will keep an eye on them both. I shall desire Derrick to come to you directly, if anything is the matter; and that your orders are to be obeyed as if they were my own.'

Mrs Cummings was not slow in proving her confidence in her aunt; she left the place two days afterwards; and Milly, who had formed a vehement attachment for her cousin Arthur, gave the Lawleigh party as much of her company as she could. Her maid seemed always glad to get rid of her; and, but for her music lessons, they would have had the pleasure of her society from morning till night. The music took up some hours every day, and very soon she began to complain of it as a horrid nuisance, and a detestable shame. It always interfered when she wanted to go anywhere or do anything, and Mrs Mornay was so cross and strict, she scolded her for every false note as if it was a crime; and, in short, she was not going to stand it much longer.

And, in spite of all Cousin Arthur's pleasant words, this new resolution grew and ripened with the difficulties of her progress, till one day she came bouncing into the drawing-room, where Anne was alone, to announce that Mrs Mornay had been so dreadfully rude to her—she had actually said she would not teach her any more! Only conceive!

Not teach her any more? Surely there must have been some strong reason for this. Had she been quite civil herself to Mrs Mornay?

Quite as civil as she deserved, cross thing. She was not going to be put upon because mamma choose to tell everybody they were poor; and she should write to mamma, and tell her so that minute.

By a little quiet reasoning, this was prevented, and, a committee having sat on the difficulty, it was agreed Miss Clavering should call on this formidable *artiste*, and, if

necessary, remonstrate politely on so much harshness being used to a child.

She called, but Mrs Mornay was engaged with other pupils, and would not be at leisure till the evening. Evening came, and she was not sorry she had been unsuccessful ; for Miss Milly, having grown cooler, was becoming more candid, and beginning to have doubts how mamma would take her story. She believed, now she thought it over, that she had perhaps been a little provoking ; but she wanted to see if she could put Mrs Mornay in a rage.

‘And you succeeded?’

‘No ; and that was the worst of it. She put on a hypocritical face as if she was pitying me, which is a thing I cannot bear ; and at last she said she could not teach me any more, until I begged her pardon.’

‘That alters the case considerably. I think she was perfectly right ; and if you tried that experiment on me, I should say just the same—perhaps in stronger language.’

‘Oh, Miss Clavering ! but you are so different. I should never dare to tease you, I’m sure.’

‘Then I suppose, if you were a man, and had to fight one or the other, you would sooner attack your Cousin Arthur, who could not defend himself, than my uncle, who could?’

‘No, indeed ; I would not hurt Cousin Arthur for the world. I would scratch any one’s eyes out who touched him !’

Well, perhaps so would I ; but if you feel so much for him, how is it you have no feeling for Mrs Mornay? You do not suppose teaching you is such a treat, that it is necessary to spoil it a little by having all your impertinence into the bargain?’

Milly did not see the force of this reasoning ; she only knew that they all hated the teachers at school, and that it was fun to put them in a rage ; but she was somewhat shaken in her favourite opinion by the view Miss Clavering took, and was brought at last to own she should be glad to make it up with Mrs Mornay. They were walking on the shore at the time, and this desirable consummation had not long been reached, when she exclaimed, ‘There she is, sitting where she sits most evenings ! Oh, Miss Clavering, do let us go back !’

‘Is that Mrs Mornay? I have seen her several times

and wondered who that pretty, delicate woman could be, always walking alone. A very formidable-looking person indeed, for a timid pupil. No wonder your spirit is broken, and your appetite gone, poor Milly. Why, you must play your scales in hourly terror of your life.'

'Now you are making fun of me, Miss Clavering; but I give you my word of honour, she makes as much fuss about a wrong note, as if it signified two pins whether one played F or G sometimes, in a piece three pages long. I hate being so particular. Do come away.'

'No, no, Milly; now we are here, we will do our duty. Come and introduce me properly, and I will do my best to bring you to a good understanding.'

How the introduction would have been made had it been left to Milly's courtesy, it were hard to say; but Anne took it out of her hands as quickly as she could, and hastened to offer the apology in her name, that she knew she should never induce her to make for herself. Mrs Mornay, who had shown some surprise and a slight degree of nervousness when first addressed, recovered herself as soon as she understood the purport of the introduction, and held out her hand to Milly with a smile, as she assured her it was only on her own account she noticed her conduct. She felt convinced they should be better friends in future. And her voice and manner were so gentle as she did so, even Milly's anti-educational prejudices could not hold their ground, and she volunteered the admission, 'I know I was very rude—but I do hate music so!'

'Do not let Cousin Arthur hear you own such treason,' said Miss Clavering.

'He heard me say so yesterday, Miss Clavering, and he made me learn a speech in Shakespeare, all about it, as a punishment. I don't mind his punishments at all. Shakespeare is much better fun than exercises. Now, Mrs Mornay, own the truth—isn't it?'

'Much better,' admitted Mrs Mornay, 'and much more amusing to teach, only I am afraid it would not be quite the same to Mrs Cummings. But I will make an agreement with you, my dear; it is not absolutely necessary that Shakespeare should be a punishment, is it?'

'No, I suppose not.'

'Then, for every lesson well performed, you shall have a quarter of an hour of Shakespeare, if you like.'

'What! your dear little Shakespeare, full of pictures? Oh, capital! And do let us begin with all the horrible ones, that have plenty of murders and ghosts! I like those much better than the fine speeches.'

'Very well—the more correctly you play, the more tragic your reward shall be.'

'Oh, thank you! thank you!' And Milly's sturdy arms were flung round her teacher, in a vehement embrace that would have sent her into the sea but for the timely interposition of Miss Clavering.

'Poor child!' she said, ironically; 'no wonder you complained Mrs Mornay was so severe. I should almost be afraid of her myself.'

Milly's face grew scarlet; she seemed on the point of breaking out into a howl; but Arthur's chair appeared in the distance, and she flew to him instead, confident of plenty of comfort and sympathy, even if he carried out a threat of making her learn by heart the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius.

Anne and her new acquaintance stood looking after her a few moments without speaking. Their eyes met, and they exchanged a smile.

'I fear you have a troublesome charge,' said Anne; 'and yet there is a good deal to like in the child, if she were only properly managed.'

'Ah!' said Mrs Mornay, thoughtfully, 'it struck me there had been some disadvantages in her early training. I do not mind the trouble if I can only do my duty by her and her mother.'

'You are very good and patient with her, I am sure.'

'Well, I was afraid she thought me harsh, but I could not attempt to teach without respect.'

'I should think not, indeed; and Mrs Cummings will, or ought to be, very grateful to you for the lesson. Mrs Mornay'—after a little hesitation—'I believe I am going to put your patience to a severe test, but have you leisure for another pupil?'

Mrs Mornay had two or three hours unemployed, certainly, but, on further consideration, it was found that they were just the hours when Anne's home circle could spare her least, and the teacher did not appear inclined to alter her present arrangements. The prospect of this new, womanly scholar seemed to daunt rather than gratify her:

Miss Clavering, however, having once resolved on learning, was not to be baffled by a trifle. She was an early riser, from force of long habit ; was Mrs Mornay the same ? Mrs Mornay had made herself one, on principle ; not exactly by choice. Then would it be inconvenient if she came for her lesson every morning before breakfast ?

‘ You are not aware, Mrs Mornay, how much there is for you to teach me. I learned music at an inferior school when I was a child ; but since I was fifteen I have done nothing. For many years of my life I had no instrument, and now I am in great doubt whether I have not lost all I acquired. But I have a strong inducement to improve. You see that young man in the Bath chair ; you know how he was crippled ? ’

‘ Yes,’ said Mrs Mornay, with glistening eyes.

‘ Well, his greatest delight is music, and it is one of my private vexations that I cannot play well enough to amuse him. I have been rather ashamed of exposing my inefficiency to a master ; but I do not think I shall feel afraid of you, Mrs Mornay, though you are so strict and severe ! and if you will take me in hand in consideration of the motive, it will really be conferring a favour.’

To such an appeal there could be but one response, and it was settled that the lessons should commence the next morning.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### TEACHER AND PUPIL.

ANNE’S diligence and energy fairly took her teacher by storm. The novelty of the employment, and the stimulus of the motive, made her such a pupil as put Mrs Mornay on her mettle. Resolved not to be found unequal to the occasion, she, on her part, became ambitious ; and if she took pains with Milly, it was nothing to her vigilance over Miss Clavering. Without coming quite into Milly’s theory, that ‘ it didn’t signify two pins whether you played F or G in a piece of three pages,’ Anne did at last own to herself that in one respect she was right. Mrs Mornay was strict, inex-

orably strict, in requiring accuracy of execution and time; and the more her scholar improved, the more determined she seemed on her further improvement. Anne bore this very well while the novelty and the first pride of conquering difficulties lasted; and she was amenable some time after to please her teacher, in whom she was rapidly taking an interest, rather stimulated than repelled by the retiring gentleness of her manner. She longed to make her happier—to hear her laugh—to give her recreation—to take her out of her sad thoughts, whatever they were, and the unvarying monotony of her life, if only for an hour—but it was difficult to get beyond a certain point; as she had penetration enough to perceive that Mrs Mornay was not insensible to her good will, but was afraid to accept it. Several failures having a little piqued our spoiled heiress, as Uncle Rupert delighted to call her, she began to grow impatient over her music, wanted to get on faster without additional trouble, and took to resenting correction as an aggravation of difficulties.

‘I wish, Mrs Mornay, your ear was not quite so sharp!’ she exclaimed one morning, when she had been detected slurring over a trying passage, and compelled to go back and face it properly; ‘it really is of no use your expecting me, with all my disadvantages, to play as well as yourself, who do nothing else!’

Directly she had spoken, her ill-humour evaporated in shame; she felt she had been uncourteous and ungrateful, and wished Mrs Mornay would say so. But though Mrs Mornay looked at her in surprise, there was no resentment in her answer. She did not expect it yet, of course, but she should be much disappointed if Miss Clavering did not excel her in time.

‘Are you saying that to put me in good-humour?’

‘I say what I believe. You have more ability, more strength of touch than I ever had; and your taste is naturally quite as good as mine, though I have had the advantage of good cultivation. You only want practice, patience, and, perhaps, a better teacher.’

‘Not a stricter one, I hope?’ said Anne, smiling.

‘A conscientious one, I should, at any rate, recommend. It requires some conscience to teach well, and a little courage too.’

Miss Clavering said no more till the lesson was over, but



she redoubled her exertions, and by her closing performance elicited some gratifying praise. When she rose from the instrument her manner was completely changed. She turned to her teacher with a look of respectful contrition that her frankness made very winning.

'Mrs Mornay, I entirely forgot myself when I spoke so rudely just now. I am so thoroughly ashamed, I can hardly hope you will overlook it; but I should like to hear you say you will try.'

It seemed easier to agitate Mrs Mornay by courtesy than by rudeness. She attempted to speak, but, finding that difficult, made a slight movement, as if to offer her hand. Anne caught it eagerly and held it fast.

'You will believe me, will you not, when I assure you I intended you no disrespect? It is my hasty, spoiled temper, that will break out sometimes before I am aware. I most heartily beg your pardon. Do look up, and let me be sure you forgive me.'

She did look up, and, seeing Anne's eyes full of tears, became eager on her side to console her. There really was nothing to forgive; she begged she would think no more about it.

'Nay, that is desiring more than I promise to do. I shall think about it all day, and hate myself, and be ill-tempered to everybody, unless you say or do something to ease my conscience.'

'That would be a pity. What do you wish me to do?'

'There—now you have smiled at me I am better. Oh, I only wish I were sure you were in an indulgent mood; generous minds never are so indulgent as when they have just pardoned an offence. I know what I should ask.'

'Do you really mean there is something I could do for you?'

'There really is. My uncle actually went twenty miles and back by train to find me a good piano; and if you would come in to tea with us this evening, and try it, you would convince me you bear no malice, and give our poor Crimean sufferer an hour or two of enjoyment, that are of more value in his state than gold.'

Mrs Mornay sighed heavily, and stooped to arrange some music that lay on the table. 'I go nowhere, Miss Clavering. I never mix in society'

'But you will not consider us society; you know our

family party by sight—an elderly gentleman, and still more elderly lady, two of the excellent of the earth—an invalid hero, and your troublesome pupil. Is that an assembly you would fear to face?’

She shook her head with a sad smile, but did not lift her eyes. Anne thought she saw a wavering in her purpose, and it encouraged her to draw nearer, and persevere.

‘Am I rude? am I intrusive?’ she said, the interest and sympathy she felt breathing so warmly both in voice and manner, that it was impossible she could offend. ‘We are alone together; we are nearly of the same age, I think; it would be hard if we could not understand each other. If any one should understand what you feel, I should; for it is not so long ago when, if an invitation had been suddenly made to me, I should have been perplexed how to accept it. Yes, I know what trouble is, and what privation is, to a certain extent, though, thank God, I have never been without a home; and I have worked hard in my time, though you may think me idle enough now. And I am not at all well versed in the ways of the world, and the rules and etiquette of society, and may, with the best intentions, be at this moment appearing impertinent and presuming; but I trust to your own sincerity of nature to read mine, and to believe that I would give a great deal to induce you to look upon me as a friend.’

She was very hard to resist when she was in earnest to win, and Mrs Mornay’s head sank lower as she murmured a few words of gratitude.

‘You are not offended, then, at my intrusiveness?’

‘Offended by kindness? You do not know how sweet it is, even when I dare not accept it.’

‘Now, what does that mean? If you choose to call this kindness, why may you not accept what you would freely give?’

‘Why?’ There was a long pause after this word before Mrs Mornay added, with more firmness than before, ‘If you knew all, Miss Clavering, you would understand that our positions in life are unequal, and therefore it is better as it is. I try to do my duty, and to be contented; it would be harder if I once laid it aside. I know it is of no use attempting to conceal from you that it is not quite what I have been accustomed to, but it is no less my duty, and I have no wish to rebel against the station in which I am

placed. If you will drive me to confessions,' she continued with a faint smile, 'I am too poor for visiting. I have no evening dress. You compel me, you see, to go into particulars.'

'Well, Mrs Mornay, I have ventured as far as I dare; I have asked a favour, and the more difficult it is to grant, the greater the obligation; but it is not for me to press it further. Still, do not you hold it every Englishwoman's duty to make a sacrifice for a wounded Crimean?'

'That is hardly a fair way of arguing, Miss Clavering.'

'Quite fair, as you would own if you knew the relief a little music is to his nerves when worn out with pain. If it were only my own selfish pleasure that is concerned, I should say no more, for I see it is against your wish; but he looks so longingly at the piano, and I know how it will be; I shall be obliged to try, and in my anxiety to distinguish myself, shall do no credit to your teaching, still less to your good opinion. You do not know what a good, patient fellow he is. His sufferings have never made him selfish. He is always thinking more of others than himself, and if we allowed it, would deny himself the luxuries that are necessities in his state, for fear his grandmother should miss anything she has been accustomed to. She lost the greater part of her property last year.'

'How? Not by the failure of—of a bank?'

'Yes, it was indeed.'

'Not Atterbury's?'

'Yes, Atterbury's,' said Anne, with a stern flush on cheek and brow; 'and of all the innocent sufferers by that disgraceful affair, hers is the most cruel case. What made you guess so quickly? Ah! I am afraid you know the story too well.'

'I do. Never mind me, but tell me this. There was a dividend declared, I know. She has recovered some part, surely?'

'A small part; and hopes are held out of more; but, to my ignorant understanding, it seems that the lawyers and commissioners are likely to get the lion's share. We do not talk about it unless we are obliged. What is the use?'

'What indeed?' Mrs Mornay's brow had become painfully knitted, and she seemed weighing something seriously in her mind. Anne watched her in silence, more and more convinced her conjecture was right, but too well bred to

recur to it. The whole mystery was solved at once, if it were so, and only an additional inducement given to show her the kindness she must so sorely need.

'I beg your pardon if the subject is painful,' she said, at last; "but as you seem to know something of this affair, Mrs Mornay, can you, from what you have heard, give us any hope?'

'Hope?' she repeated, slowly fixing her eyes on Anne's face.

'I mean, will the losses ever be made up?'

Mrs Mornay stooped again over the table, but this time it was to hide her face in her hands.

Anne's chest heaved with emotion, and her voice sounded unusually deep when she spoke again. 'It needs a strong and vivid faith in another world to keep one from asking why such wrong is allowed in this. It will return on the wrong-doers in time—in time; it must, if it has not come already!'

She walked to the window for air, for the blood was boiling in her temples, and she could not trust herself even to so gentle a witness. By so doing, she did not see the convulsion that passed over her features as she raised and turned them towards the light; and when she looked round again, its only trace was in the moisture that Mrs Mornay was faintly wiping from her forehead.

'I am afraid you are not well. I am keeping you from your breakfast. How inconsiderate of me! I will go directly, and I will tease you no more, if you will shake hands.'

The hand she shook was so cold and damp, Mrs Mornay was obliged to own she felt a little tired and faint. She was not very strong—had not been ever since a—a severe illness some months ago; but it was of no consequence. If Miss Clavering would allow her to change her mind, and if she was in earnest about the good effect of music on the invalid, she would do herself the honour of waiting upon them at eight o'clock that evening, for an hour, and do her best towards the payment of the debt that she freely owned was due. She said no more about her dress, and there was a mild dignity in her compliance that was very like conferring a favour. Anne chose to accept it as such, and thanked her accordingly.

Uncle Rupert, who was in the habit of meeting his niece half way on these occasions, to escort her home, had been

waiting rather impatiently, considering it was Anne he waited for ; wondering if Mrs Mornay was keeping her to breakfast, and when he should get his. He was rather taken by surprise to hear of the proposed evening visit. 'You seem to have taken a wonderful fancy to this new acquaintance, Anne, my dear. It is the first time I ever saw you care about a young lady ; I thought you had an antipathy to the whole race.'

'It never was worse than indifference, uncle ; and that arose simply from my never having had a female friend of my own age in my life ; but it is quite true that I have lost a good deal of my heart to this interesting woman, and I shall be much disappointed if she does not steal yours too.'

'My dear, we must remember we know nothing about her. Nobody here knows more than that she has been giving music-lessons all the summer ; and where she comes from, or what are her antecedents, I cannot find out. I hope it is all right, but one likes to be sure.'

'Of course one does ; but how sly of you, Uncle Rupert, to go making inquiries without telling me. I am not at all sorry your curiosity was baffled. I am perfectly convinced, myself, that she is a gentlewoman born and bred, and that she has seen better days. Her manners, her voice, her conversation, are all those of a person used to good society. To-day, I am sure she made me feel so ashamed of my own ill breeding, I could have gone down on my knees to ask her pardon.'

'I can hardly imagine that necessary, Anne, my dear. I never saw you ill bred to any one, and I hope I never shall. The Claverings were always known for their courtesy to high and low.'

'Yes, but they were not all spoiled by 'uncles from Australia, till they could not bear to be corrected, even for blunders they were ashamed of. Uncle, there is one claim this lady has on our kindness, which I have accidentally discovered this morning. I am convinced she, too, is a sufferer by that failure.'

'Likely enough ! Poor thing ! Is her husband living ?'

'I suppose so, as her dress is not that of a widow ; but I have not heard her mention him. We will not allude to the subject of the bank before her, for it was more than she could hear to-day ; I saw that.'

'Certainly not. It would be impertinent to do so. But

if there is anything in the way of business that I can do, and you have an opportunity of mentioning it, you may tell her I shall be happy to be of service. When shall we ever get to the bottom of that abyss of misery and wrong ?'

Punctual to her appointment the visitor came that evening, with a goodly roll of music in her hand, that augured well for Arthur's enjoyment. The effort it cost her could not of course, be appreciated by her entertainers; but by the cordial politeness with which she was received, they did their best to repay the exertion, and remove the reserve with which she attempted to fence herself. Accustomed now for some time to be always on her guard, she was, at first, more reserved than was quite agreeable; it seemed, during the first quarter of an hour, as if they should never get beyond common-place observations. But she could not keep it up; she forgot herself, and the necessity for watchfulness and caution, when she saw Captain Sydney writhe on his sofa, and gnaw his lip to keep down a groan; and having once forgotten them, her natural grace of manner returned, without her being conscious of the change. Anne's judgment was clearly justified, and her prediction was in a fair way of fulfilment, for one and all were taken with their stranger guest.

Sorrow and sickness, worse ravagers than time, of whose terrible power even Anne's elastic frame and animated features still retained the trace, had swept over Eleanor's beauty and strength as with a blight, from which there could be no recovery. We all know how faces look that are preyed on by gnawing grief, or ceaseless anxiety, or hopeless longing; and so much of all these had been and still was hers, that her physical or mental power must have given way, but for the childlike faith, that endured, as seeing the invisible. Shame, concealment, poverty, and desertion, had all had their share in bruising her spirit, but they had not broken it yet; and the burden so resignedly borne, in a strength not her own, even while it bowed her head, invested her with a dignity of which she was little aware.

Its effect on each of the four that evening was according to their respective temperaments. Mrs Sydney thought her a very pretty-behaved, modest young woman, who had evidently had a good deal of trouble, and whom she should be glad to assist in any way that would not hurt her feelings.

She should write to dear Millicent about her, and see if they could not recommend her into some nice family, where she would have her comforts, and her glass of port wine every day at dinner, which Mrs Sydney was sure was what her poor pale face wanted most. Nay, if she were only rich enough, and if it were not for dearest Arthur, she wished she could invite her to come and stay some months with her in the country, and see if a little care, and plenty of good wholesome nourishment, would not put a little more flesh on her bones. She did, indeed.

Arthur, who lay criticising her person all the time she was playing, gave vent to his private opinion by suddenly exclaiming, at the close of a favourite waltz, 'Mrs Mornay, I wish I had had the pleasure of knowing you two years ago !'

'Do you, sir ?' she said, turning round with a good-humoured smile.

'Yes. I am convinced you are as fond of dancing as I am, and I might have had the honour of trying. No one could play like that who was not a good dancer.'

She looked compassionately at him without reply, thinking more of his privations than of her own. She was not prepared for his next observation.

'Did you ever happen to meet a friend of mine—Compton—Tommy Compton, as everybody calls him ? The wildest fellow about dancing I ever saw, and I have seen a few. He will ride any distance, travel any number of hours for a ball, and never sit down the whole night. Fact, granny, I assure you. But then he would lie in bed the next day till it was time to be off to another, so it all came square at the end of the week, you know. Shocking, isn't it ? Mrs Mornay, if it is not encroaching on your good nature, please go on ; only no more of those dances, or I shall begin to tear my hair.'

Eleanor complied, thankful to have escaped answering his question ; and she drowned further remarks in a brilliant arrangement of a popular opera. He watched her the while with keen attention ; wishing her black silk dress were rather fresher, and that she would not hide her hair in that prim little net cap, for all the world like an hospital nurse. How pretty she must have been when she had more colour, and was not so thin. How head and ears in love with her he should have been in those days. How they would have danced ! What a delicious player she was !

How he wished he was a Southern State monster in 'Uncle Tom,' and she his slave—what a life he would lead her, to be sure ! Morning, noon, and night whenever these blessed red-hot irons walked through his marrow, as they were so fond of doing, he would make her have a tune ready, if he had to keep her chained up to the leg of the piano. And the notion rather tickling his fancy he presently expressed it aloud. He was glad to see he could make her laugh. She came across the room, and sat down by his sofa, feeling for the moment like Eleanor Ormonde.

'Indeed, Captain Sydney, if my playing really gives you so much pleasure, you have only to send for me at any hour—I do not say of the night, but of the day—and unless I am actually engaged with pupils, I will come directly. I do not recommend you to try the chain ; you had better trust to free labour and the voluntary principle.'

'And I do not recommend you, ma'am, to put your head under his yoke too readily,' said Uncle Rupert. 'He is a slave-driver spoiled—a domestic Legree. He makes us all do just what he pleases, and look as if we were only pleasing ourselves. My niece there will do things for him that I dare not ask her to do ; and if he really insisted on our padlocking you to the piano and giving him the key, I very much doubt if we should venture to remonstrate.'

'I had better make use of my liberty while I have it, then,' said Eleanor. She had already exceeded the time she had fixed for her visit, and had a task at home to perform before she slept, so began in earnest to take leave. But Arthur was not so ready to part with her, and while Uncle Rupert was fetching her bonnet and shawl, and his own hat, he used his invalid privileges to their full extent, for the pleasure of seeing those soft grey eyes looking kindly at him a little while longer.

'I assure you, Mrs Mornay, it is quite an exploded *man-and-brother* superstition about the inconvenience of the chain and padlock. Hundreds wear them constantly, and think nothing of it—rather like it—at least so the people say who put them on. You must rise above illiberal prejudice ; and when once you were used to have no will of your own, you would soon play just as sweetly because you couldn't help it, as you do now to give pleasure.'

'Perhaps so. There is a great deal in knowing that you *must*.'



'But there is more in feeling that you *won't*,' said Anne Clavering. 'The compulsion would be a greater hindrance than the weight of the chain.'

'Yes, there is a lady, Mrs Mornay,' said Arthur, 'whom I defy all New Orleans to flog through the first bar of "Yankee Doodle" against her will. She makes a first-rate volunteer, but, as a slave, I would not have her at a gift.'

'You are quite right, Captain; I do not think I *could* perform under such annihilating circumstances, if I coupled the genius of Mozart with the good-nature of Mrs Mornay; and the more you cracked the whip, the more impracticable it would become.'

'Even where resistance was utterly useless?' asked Eleanor.

'That would only make me more desperate. You think differently, I see. You would feel the chain perhaps, more than I should, but you would do your best to avoid the whip.'

'I am afraid I should; anything would be better to me than a perpetual struggle to no purpose. But fear would in all probability be as fatal to my performance as pride to yours; so I still recommend Captain Sydney to let well alone.'

'I wish we could try the experiment,' said he. 'The man who was caliph for a day got well licked afterwards, but it was quite worth while. I would stand—let me see—what?—a week of Cousin Millicent's economy (little Milly is not here, so we may indulge in a bit of treason) just to have the torturing of you four for four-and-twenty hours. It really requires some imagination and knowledge of character to torture well. I could do it with a refinement of cruelty that would be almost sublime. Miss Clavering's doom would be terrible. I know exactly how near madness she can be goaded, without going beyond the point after which she would be unmanageable. She should never be allowed to express an opinion without having to argue about it for an hour, or to put in a pin that somebody did not immediately pull out and stick in somewhere else, or to take a walk without saying exactly how far she meant to go, and reporting when she came in, how many wonderful things she had seen. She should have long visits from talkative people three times a day, and be obliged to press them to stop whenever they offered to go, and to beg them to call again and bring all the dear children——'

'Hold—hold !' interrupted Anne ; ' you promised to stop short of insanity, and by this time I should be past cure.'

'And there was something personal about those long visits, Captain Sydney,' added Eleanor. 'I will go before it is repeated.'

'Ah, you are afraid of hearing what your fate would be, Mrs Mornay. You do not like to think of the chain and the leg of the piano. But there would be more in store than you think for—you would be compelled to play Handel in polka time, and Tarantelles to the measure of the "Dead March in Saul," and Verdi on Sundays—at the desire by-the-by, of granny, who would be playing *rouge-et-noir* in church-time, and making up a little book on the Derby, as an elementary work for the Sunday-school, with frightful penalties if she backed the wrong horse. Stop, Mrs Mornay, your sufferings are not over yet. You would have to sit smiling while Vandals murdered your favourite composer, and the more they went out of tune, the more delightful you would look——'

'Take care, sir,' she said ; 'this is more personal still.'

'And cut two ways,' added Anne ; 'though if the fear of the whip produce smiling at false notes, I am inclined to vote for its protection during my lesson to-morrow.'

'What is all this discussion about ?' asked Mr Clavering, coming in with Eleanor's shawl, which he placed on her shoulders with old-fashioned gallantry ; 'what stuff is this half-pay officer talking now ? I wish the Special Correspondent of the *Times* would take him in hand. He wants hauling over the coals more than any gentleman of his inches that I know.'

'I am settling how miserable I could make you all, if I had unlimited powers for a day. What a jolly time you would have of it, Mr Clavering ! You should have a dozen fellows that couldn't pronounce their 'r's,' borrowing money of you without security, and quizzing you when you asked for it back again ; and five swindling companies with unlimited liability, putting your name down on their list of directors, and the shareholders calling upon you to make their losses good ; and you should just have put all the money you had saved to pay off the national debt, or supply all Africa with Wenham Lake ice, or make a tunnel under the Channel to save people from sea-sickness, or some such scheme of world-wide philanthropy——'

'World-wide fiddlesticks ! Hold your tongue, do !'

'Just have paid it in, I say, and were going to sit down

under the shadow of your good deed for the rest of your days, when smash should go your banker, and not twopence-half-penny in the pound !’

Why had he not stopped a minute sooner ? The evening visit had been so pleasant, the lively talk such a novelty, the kindly deference so soothing, Eleanor had felt refreshed as she had not been for many a long day, and her deep blush at this unexpected turn of the conversation, was too palpable to pass unobserved. Mrs Sydney only shook her head with a remark that such things were beyond a joke ; Anne, after a quick glance at her uncle, busied herself in fastening her guest’s shawl, which her trembling hands were vainly attempting—something was said about a threatening cloud, and it served as an excuse for a somewhat abrupt departure.

‘That is a very sensible, deserving interesting young woman,’ pronounced Uncle Rupert, when he returned. He had been away much longer than could be accounted for by the length of the walk. ‘I have a very high opinion of her, I assure you.’

‘We take that for granted, sir,’ said Arthur, ‘considering how long you took to escort her home.’

‘Why it was just beginning to rain, so she asked me in, and I sat with her till it was over. To tell you the truth, I wanted to find out something of her affairs, so as to see if there were any means of helping her ; but all I could learn was, that she depended entirely on her own exertions, and was content to do so ; and that when one employment failed, she was ready to try another—it seemed much the same to her what she did. Music-lessons in these parts being precarious pay, she ekes out her earnings by needlework, and as far as I could judge, very beautifully she was doing it, too. Now that is what I call being sensible ; instead of standing on her dignity, and thinking herself more degraded by one kind of work than another, she does whatever she can get to do. That is the woman for Australia. I wish we could transplant her there.’

‘I don’t at all,’ said Arthur ; ‘and begging your pardon, though it may do for Australia, or any idiotic place of that sort where everything is topsy-turvy, it is not the way to get on here. She would be thought twice as good a teacher, and make twice the money, if she charged a guinea a lesson, and that as a favour, than she ever will by taking what screws choose to give, and filling up chinks with button-holes. I hope

you did not go and put it in her head that her music is wanted in the bush ?’

‘Not exactly : she wished for information about California, but that was out of my line. We had a long talk about penal laws and settlements, by the way ; and she told me a sad story about a convict’s wife in Westminster, that I must make a note of, as I promised to inquire about the man. I have a friend or two in power who will do anything in reason, if I ask them. I must have the particulars first, though. Mrs Mornay is to get them for me.

‘You seem to have grown very confidential all in a hurry, Uncle Rupert,’ said Anne, ‘considering how wise and prudent you were on the subject this morning.’

‘My dear, I never knew your judgment at fault yet, and I must have liked her on your recommendation ; now I have seen her for myself, I can truly say I do not care how often you bring her here. I only wish we could take her down to Lawleigh.’

‘Oh, uncle !’ Anne’s face had suddenly lighted up, but as quickly she checked the eager impulse, and, rather to the disappointment of both gentlemen, changed the subject, which was resumed no more that evening.

Early the next morning, before Miss Clavering was dressed, came Mrs Derrick, Milly’s maid, panting, and almost in tears, to speak to the ladies. Anne saw her first, and heard her tale of woe before she allowed Mrs Sydney to be disturbed. It appeared that she had taken Miss Millicent the day before on an excursion, partly by sea and partly by land, along with some acquaintance made on the beach ; that they were caught in a shower ; that Miss Milly had complained of her throat in the evening, and did not seem well but would not take a single thing, or do anything that was recommended to her ; that she had woke up in the night so bad, Derrick had been quite frightened, and had called Mrs Mornay, who was luckily not gone to bed ; and Mrs Mornay had thought her sickening for the scarletina, and had stayed with her all the rest of the night, and Derrick was now going for the doctor, and had come round to let Mrs Sydney know—and what was she to do ? She was frightened to death at the idea of scarletina, and was sure she could catch it ; and where was she to find a nurse, and Mrs Cummings gone abroad ? Oh dear, dear, dear, what was to become of them all ?

Mrs Sydney was not slow in deciding, when once she un-

derstood the emergency. The dear child had been left to a certain extent, in her charge, and she was the proper person to see after her. She would not hear of Miss Clavering exposing herself—on this point she was peremptory for once—until it was proved to be necessary. She should go to the house directly, and let them know later what she had decided upon. And as in this matter she had received authority, and had a right to decide, Anne was fain to submit, prophesying that Derrick would prove worse than useless, and that she should be called in for want of a better nurse. She was not prepared for the arrangement that was finally made. Mrs Sydney came back in the afternoon to announce that the doctor pronounced it scarletina, in a mild and favourable form—that Derrick was so terrified, she could do nothing—and that as no nurse could be obtained at so short a notice, she had been obliged to accept the proposal of Mrs Mornay, and engage her in that capacity. Her music-lessons would be all stopped by this *contretemps*, so, as she said, she was glad to be earning something in another way. She, too, looked upon Milly as partly given into her charge, and would do her utmost to fulfil the trust.

‘So if I relieve her part of the day, she can manage the night attendance,’ added Mrs Sydney. ‘I feel such confidence in her, now I have seen her gentle, thoughtful ways in the sick-room, and her patience in dealing with the poor child, that I would trust Arthur with her, or anybody. So now one of us must sit down and write to poor dear Millicent Cummings. I expect we shall have her back by return of post.’

‘Ah!’ said Arthur, ‘that is the trying part of these complaints—they are so often the prelude to something worse!’

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### NURSE AND PATIENT.

MRS CUMMINGS did not hasten her return on Milly’s account. The letter was some days in reaching her; and a little consideration of the matter decided the mother that as she could not be in two places at once, or fulfil two opposing duties at one and the same time, it would be better to leave

the dear child in the hands of her aunt—to whom the nursing would be a positive treat—and not break up the party in which her elder girls were so much admired, or deprive them of the advantages they were turning to such good account. The good reports that were punctually sent by Mrs Sydney confirmed her in this decision ; she wrote long letters in reply, full of thanks and praise to her dear kind aunt and friends—explained that if she came back now, at great inconvenience, she could not take dear Milly home, and should not know what to do with her sisters—she quite approved all Mrs Sydney had done—Derrick's behaviour was absolutely atrocious ! what did she think she was hired for ? She should be sent about her business as soon as Mrs Cummings came home ; meanwhile her aunt must keep a strict watch upon her proceedings, and would be kind enough to look over all the accounts of their weekly expenditure, that they might not be imposed upon. She was quite satisfied with the arrangement with Mrs Mornay ; she was sure she was an excellent creature, and very respectable ; and though, of course, she would not expect the remuneration of a professed nurse, Mrs Cummings would take care she was no loser by any services rendered to her sick child.

And so the time slipped away unmarked by incident, for the attack was favourable from the first, and there was much more fatigue than anxiety for the attendants. Never was a more rebellious patient ; Derrick called her ' a handful,' with some justice, though she took care her own hands should be troubled with nothing that she could in any way shift upon those of Mrs Mornay. And Mrs Mornay with all her excellent theories of nursing, was sometimes fairly at her wits' end ; for Mrs Sydney grew so nervous during the battles over the remedies, that she generally contrived to slip away ; and then Milly, in the full consciousness of her nurse's inferior strength, would fight till they were both so tired they did not know what to do. It would end at last sometimes in Eleanor's begging her to yield, as a favour to herself ; but in the worst extremity, she would threaten to send for Mr Clavering, and there was a vague dread of something awful happening in that case, which generally had the desired effect. But all this told on the nurse, and she could scarcely have gone through her undertaking had not her new friends been constantly on the watch to beguile her out for fresh air—to supply her with the delicacies still forbidden to the patient—and to cheer her, as

far as they could, with praise, and encouragement, and hearty good will. Supported by this treatment she persevered, and her gentle solicitude gradually softened Milly's obdurate heart, especially as she grew convalescent, and found herself luxuriously languid—a thing she had never known before—petted and caressed by aunt and nurse, flattered by notes, and messages, and bouquets from Arthur—by presents of fruit, books, and pictures from Mr Clavering, benignantly unconscious of the use that had been made of his name—and by plans sketched out by Anne for her future enjoyment, in holidays yet to come, which she should spend at Lawleigh, with a pony to ride, and a garden that should be called her own. In the softened state of mind brought on by this prosperity, Milly could afford to recollect how much trouble she had given Mrs Mornay, how tired she had often seen her look, and how she had never, from beginning to end, returned her ill-humour by so much as a cross word. And at last this better feeling worked out a confession, and a remark expressive of wonder that Mrs Mornay could have put up with her as she did.

Eleanor listened silently, and then stooped to kiss her for the first time.

'My child,' she said in a choked voice, 'If I had laid down my life for you, it would have been no more than my duty.' Then, as if afraid of saying more, she left the room more hastily than usual, and Milly, putting her hand to her forehead, found it wet with her tears.

At last the medical man pronounced his patient fit to travel, and that change of air would be her best restorative. By this time, her mother and sisters were in Paris, and after several letters had gone backwards and forwards about the how, when, and where, of their junction, Mrs Cummings finally proposed an arrangement which seemed the most feasible of any. She did not wish to take Milly home, or to let her be with her sisters just at first; but she had great news to tell her—charming news; her sisters were both engaged to be married; and though it was not certain about one wedding, the other was fixed for the early spring. Of course this would compel her to be very busy in London before going home, and a friend had lent her her house in Pimlico, where she wished Milly to meet her. As she had no confidence whatever in Derrick, and it would be difficult to find a respectable person to accompany her to town, it had occurred to her that Mrs Mornay, now her professional engagements had been so interrupted, might

not object to the charge. Mrs Cummings was the more anxious that she should accept it, as she could then communicate with her about something that she believed would be very much to her advantage. Hereupon followed a lucid statement of the route to be followed, trains, hours of starting and expenses ; with more expressions of grateful regard for her dear friends than it is incumbent on us to repeat.

The plan really sounded well ; for as Mrs Mornay had not yet received a farthing for her various services, it was expedient she and Mrs Cummings should come to a settlement in person. Nevertheless, even the pressure of necessity would hardly have overcome the repugnance to the London journey, but for a circumstance that seemed to have little to do with it. Arthur happened to mention in her presence that he was expecting a visit from his friend Tommy Compton, who had been doing his duty by the grouse, and was on his way to do it by the partridges ; and time and distance being of no more account to him than money, he had arranged to turn a little out of his direct route for a few days of Sydney's company. Mrs Mornay made no comment at the time, but she decided from that moment on accepting the patronage of Mrs Cummings.

The Claverings agreed between themselves that they ought not to interfere, and prevent her receiving her well-earned recompense from the rightful quarter ; but they had secret misgivings that she would not be liberally dealt with ; and parted with her reluctantly, longing more than either ventured to confess to the other, to take her under their own care and protection, and save her from the buffetings of the hard world. They had all grown to consider her as a friend ; and though she had tried to guard herself from becoming attached to them in return, it had been quite impossible. There were times when a yearning after rest, and her own name and position, made her feel as if she could have entrusted them with her secret, and have flown to the shelter she was sure would be offered, and have lain down there thankfully—even if to die. The fact of her being so tempted was an additional reason for leaving them, but her heart was very full when she bade them good-bye. Even Arthur looked dull, and there was as much earnestness as jest in his parting whisper, ' Don't let Cousin Milly chain and padlock you, whatever you do '—a warning she had afterwards good cause to remember.

As to Milly the younger, she cried so passionately at the parting, it was agreed among them all she had better not be



exposed to another ; and Mr Clavering abandoned his design of seeing the travellers start, and perhaps accompanying them part of the way. He did so with reluctance, fearing, from what he had observed, that his friend Mrs Mornay would have a trying time of it—as indeed she had.

The directions for the expedition had been explicitly given, as Mrs Cummings knew it would require care and management to make trains and hours fit, and Eleanor was naturally anxious that they should be carried out to the letter ; but it was a task of perpetual difficulty. Derrick was offended at having been, as she said, pushed out of her place by nobody knew who ; and as she had been spoken against, and had tales told of her, people should see she didn't mean to put up with it. So she laid herself out to give trouble, with brilliant success. They were late at the station, in spite of all Eleanor's exhortations ; and it was only by great haste and breathless exertion that they started at all. At every change of trains—of which they had three—she kept aloof as much as possible, leaving Mrs Mornay to carry all the stray luggage, besides the entire responsibility of Milly, who had to be watched, and fed, and kept in good-humour, to prevent her getting into draughts or mischief. At their last change, indeed, where they had only a few minutes to spare, this last charge so absorbed the whole of Eleanor's time, she was obliged to leave Derrick to see the boxes put up—a necessity she rued when too late ; for when they reached the London terminus, her own portmanteau was not forthcoming. It was telegraphed for, and she was promised it the next day, and with this promise she was forced to be content ; but even her sweet temper found it so difficult not to be angry, she said nothing, for fear of saying too much. Milly was less scrupulous. 'I do say,' she exclaimed, as soon as they were all in the cab, 'you might have seen after Mrs Mornay's box, Derrick. You knew she was getting me some tea.'

'I am not aware, Miss Millicent, that my mistress expected me to wait on any one but you.'

'And you don't wait on me more than you can help, I'm sure ; and when you thought there was danger, you left her, to do it all,' said Milly.

'I was not engaged as sick-nurse, Miss Millicent. I don't pretend to do everybody else's work.'

'Nor your own either. We all know that.'

Eleanor stopped the wrangle at this point with a quiet

assumption of authority, that neither attempted to dispute ; and the rest of the drive passed in silence. Milly hoped she saw that Derrick was rather ashamed of herself, and secretly enjoyed the prospect of the scene that would follow their arrival. Whenever a maid was sent away, mamma and sisters had so many stories to tell, she had come to the conclusion that bad servants were much more amusing than good ones : and in emulation of her elders, had stored up a few racy anecdotes, that, she flattered herself, would produce no little sensation, it was therefore, a double disappointment on arriving to find Mrs Cummings was not expected till the next morning. No one was in the house but the cook, who had it in charge ; and no order had been given for the reception of Mrs Mornay. Eleanor had understood she would be lodged for one night at any rate, and she was distressed and perplexed by this unexpected turn of affairs. Owing to some miscalculation, or misunderstanding, Milly's finances had run so short, that Mrs Mornay, at the last moment, had been obliged to advance the money for their tickets, and this had nearly drained her purse. Her slender store in reserve was in her portmanteau, miles away ; Derrick was sullenly resolved to give her no help—she knew nothing about it, except that *she* would not take upon herself to let anybody in without orders—Mrs Cummings would not thank anyone who did. Milly was furious, and protested she would go with Mrs Mornay if Mrs Mornay might not come in with her ; an outbreak that helped Eleanor to a speedy decision. Without answering, or seeming to hear Derrick's observations, she consulted the cook on the subject of lodgings ; and the latter, who did not see why she should not be civil to one who looked and spoke so much like a lady, sympathized in her difficulties, and gave her the best advice she could. She directed her to a street where lodgings were let, and even offered to walk with her part of the way, but this Eleanor would not suffer, on Milly's account. She took a hasty leave of her charge, begged her to be quiet and good, and go early to bed ; and walked from the inhospitable portal with her small bag in her hand, as if she had only to step to the corner of the street to find a carriage and footman waiting for her orders.

She had grown accustomed to think for herself, and to go about alone, but not in London ; and she was weary and out of spirits with the vexations of the day ; and therefore it was with a sinking heart, that after proceeding some way according

to her instructions, she found she had left the more respectable region for one darker and dingier than she had ever walked through in her life. She grew uneasy at the appearance of the locality, lost her way several times, and instead of the street she intended, found herself at last close to Westminster Abbey. By this time she was so tired, that her first object was to rest, and a vision of the grand, dim cloister, of which she had once had a glimpse in happier days, rose before her like a refuge. She might sit there for a few minutes, at any rate, and think of what she should do next; and having found the entrance, with the help of the general public, she sank down on the first stone bench she reached, too grateful for the quiet shelter to criticise its grimy hue. The cloisters felt comparatively cool after the noise and heat of the streets; and the stillness was so refreshing, she remained there longer than was good for her. Mind and body were tired out, and instead of exerting herself, as she knew she ought, she sat dreamily musing on her predicament, as if it had been somebody else's. She thought of the last times she had wandered like this, and how kind the Treshams had been. She always remembered their kindness—not their first cold looks. What had become of them all, she wondered? How little they knew of her sitting there without a home where to lay her head! Not that she was so badly off either; at the worst she could go to an hotel, though the state of her exchequer, and the dread of being noticed and recognized, made her feel as if she would rather stay where she was: at any rate, she need not starve, like Jane Eyre, because she had lost her luggage for a day. Perhaps it was a good thing to experience, just for once, a little of what they feel who have literally nowhere to go, and no means of bettering their condition. If ever she grew rich again, she thought she would build or buy a place where respectable women could be lodged for a night on application; only London was so large, one such place would be of little use; who was to find it, or reach it, from the other end of the town? Perhaps others would take it up if she began it. How much would it cost? She lost herself in a maze of calculations, till roused by some one passing, to the recollection, with a smile of pity at her own want of energy, that time was getting on, and she was still unhoused.

‘This will not do. I wish Mr Shannon was in town, [I might go to him; and yet——’ The remembrance of her flight to his house from Mr Tresham’s; of her stay there, with his two sisters, who came on purpose to take care of

her; of their untidy ways, the slovenliness of the rooms, the perpetual wrangling of the ladies, and their undisguised jealousy of herself, made her shudder at that prospect, even in idea. Then she thought of the long, dreary illness that followed, when it had seemed as if death and she had shaken hands—and yet, he had held back, and she was still struggling on—for what? And her thoughts were astray again, wondering what roof, whether wood, or stone, or canvas, or Heaven's sky, sheltered the head of the exile in California—and what he would feel if he saw her now—when the person who had passed, and whose attention had been caught by her attitude, came slowly back, and stood looking at her some minutes before venturing to speak.

'I beg your pardon, if I am mistaken, but I don't think I am—it *is* Miss Ormonde, sure? I forget your married name, ma'am, and always did. It *is* Miss Ormonde—I am sure of it! Don't you remember me, ma'am, that you was so good to about your beautiful handkerchiefs?'

Eleanor remembered the handkerchiefs better than the face. Her first emotion was one of annoyance at being recognized, but the grateful delight of the woman at the meeting cheered her in spite of herself; and it was a comfort after all, to have some one to speak to and take counsel with. She was not long in confessing that she was sitting there because at a loss what to do next, and that it would be rendering her a great service if she could direct her to a respectable lodging, at a low price, for the night.

Mrs Mackay's eyes, sharpened by rude contact with the world, ran keenly over the lady's dress; and putting together what she saw and what she remembered to have heard, she had no difficulty in understanding what this meant, though she could only conjecture how it had come about. Between her eagerness to be of service and her fear of offending, she felt so embarrassed, that her only resource was in rapid talking.

'Dear heart alive, ma'am, a lodging for you? Why, there ought to be scores and scores of them to be had at this time of year, if one knew where to lay one's hand upon them; but you see it is getting latish, and you are tired. If I had only known a bit sooner—let me think. You must know, ma'am, I am better off than when you came to see me, praised be the Lord! I always believed you brought me a blessing, for when Miss Luke she see me doing your work, that you was good enough to pay for beforehand so liberal, ma'am, and heard my

story, she was quite warm about it ; and, says she, ' I can't get you back to Madam's,' she says, "for its against the rules, but I'll tell you what I'll do for you," she says, "I'll speak to the ladies as knows Mrs—I beg your pardon, I always forget your married name—and when they hear *she* employs you, I'm sure *they* will." And so many of them have done, ma'am, ever since, and it has been good paying work too ; and the children goes to school now, regular, and I have my things decent about me ; and my husband's father, poor old soul, is gone to his rest, for which be thankful, for he was a burden to hisself and everybody else, poor dear, though I did my duty by him, and nobody never heard me complain. And if it was not so poor a place for a lady, I should only be too proud to give you my room, ma'am—it is clean and tidy now, that is all I can say for it—if it was not taking too great a liberty even to mention such a thing.'

She did not quite know how far she might venture, nor how low her benefactress might have fallen ; and she had seen ladies, as young and as fragile, to whom such an offer would have been of inestimable value. It was a relief, in more ways than one, that Eleanor smiled as she thanked her, and observed she had no wish to burden her hospitality especially as she had lately been nursing a child with scarletina. A clean bedroom was all she required, how small it was she did not mind ; she supposed for two or three shillings it could be had. Mrs Mackay just recollected a certain very respectable person, very much so indeed, who had told her, only a day or two ago, that at this time of year she did not mind letting any part of her house—single gentlemen being preferred, as least trouble.

'But she'll not object to a lady, if I speak to her, and explain, I make no doubt. It is close by, ma'am, if you like to try. What name shall I say, ma'am ?'

'Mornay, if you please.'

'Mornay. Yes, ma'am. The woman looked puzzled, for it certainly was not what she expected ; she remembered there was an M on the handkerchiefs, but she could have sworn it was not the last letter. However she was too civil to make any comment, and was leading the way out of the cloister, when Eleanor stopped, and laid her hand on her arm.

'One thing more ; I believe you consider I did you a service once.'

'Did me a service, ma'am ? I should think you did.'

'Then I can trust you to do me one.'

'Anything in my poor power, ma'am, I shall only be too proud.'

'Then do not tell any one, on any pretence whatever, who or what I am. I am anxious not to be recognized for many reasons. I may trust to you to keep my secret.'

'Certainly, ma'am, you may. But eh, dear, that it should have come to this !'

It was all she allowed herself to say. She took up Mrs Mornay's bag, and walked a step behind her, directing her which turning to take ; but little more conversation passed, till they found themselves in Great College Street, at the door of Mrs Brown. A brief colloquy with that mild potentate—a tidy little woman, who had been good-looking in her time, but always seemed to have the cares of the kingdom on her mind—sufficed to make the required arrangements ; and the lady was shown up to a tiny bed-room at the top of the house, which she might occupy for a moderate sum, and where, after a little amicable discussion, it was agreed she should be boarded from her hostess's table. Mrs Mackay waited till all was settled, and then came respectfully to the door to entreat she might be allowed to wait upon her ; and Eleanor, tired as she was, had not the heart to reject services proffered in such perfect good will. She remembered, too, what she had to tell her, and though directly she touched on her calamity, the poor woman's tongue was unloosed, and could not be stopped for a quarter of an hour, she did contrive at last to make her understand she must send all the papers referring to her husband's case to the address of 'Rupert Clavering, Esq., Lawleigh Hall, Hadlow, —shire.'

'Clavering !' The name caught Mrs Brown's attention as she came in that moment with sheets and towels. 'You don't happen to know a gentleman and lady of that name, ma'am, do you ? an elderly gentleman from Australia, and a young lady, his niece ?'

Yes, Mrs Mornay had seen them very lately. Dear me, Mrs Brown was very glad, for the young lady had left a few things behind her, and she had never known where they ought to be sent, she would bring the parcel to Mrs Mornay, and perhaps she would let them know. And her respect for her lodger increased visibly, though there was still a certain amount of patronage in her manner that extremely exasperated Mrs Mackay.

It went to Eleanor's heart to see how this struggling woman, whom she had, at so little cost to herself, pitied and helped in her need, seemed to look upon her as a superior being, to whom if she paid service and duty for the rest of her life, it would be all too little. To her it appeared, on looking back, that she had passed her youth in ease and luxury : the good deeds that had pleased her conscience at the time, seeming so few, so poor, so far short of a Christian's duty, that all this gratitude for one kind action made her long to have done more while she could. She felt, in its true force, the truth of those touching words of her favourite poet :

Alas ! the gratitude of men  
Hath oftener left me mourning !

It was true that Mrs Mackay was a little oppressive in her attentions, and talked a great deal more than was necessary, and repeated the same thing over and over again, till Eleanor hardly knew what she said : and no less true, that her voice, so civil and pleasant when addressed to herself, sounded uncommonly sharp and shrill on the stairs when she was lecturing Mrs Brown's little maid (her ninth within the twelvemonth) for coming into Mrs Mornay's room with a dirty apron ; but Eleanor had been solitary long enough to overlook many shortcomings for the sake of disinterested good-will, and patiently concealed her fatigue till her humble friend took leave. She listened to all she had to say about her husband's wrongs, promising to look over the papers before they were forwarded to Mr Clavering ; and sent her away, at last, full of hopes for the future, which she would have given the world to share.

She was not left long in solitude, however ; for Mrs Brown, who came up with her little parcel, when she had delivered it to Mrs Mornay, stood looking at it with a deep sigh, and an ominous shake of the head, too ominous not to be noticed. A mild inquiry as to whether anything was the matter, served at first only to elicit a groan, and then a significant 'Matter, ma'am ?—Ah, dear me !—No, I do not say as anything is the matter, but I know what I know, and I see what I see, and there's a deal goes on in this world, Mrs Mornay, that nobody sees, and that nobody thanks you when you *do* see. Ah ! Well ! Time will show, ma'am, who was right and who was wrong.'

Eleanor had nothing to say to the contrary, though she did not quite see how it applied, and rather hoped no explanation would be given. But Mrs Brown was standing look-

ing at *her* now, and shaking her head so solemnly, it made her quite nervous.

'Will you not sit down?' she asked, with her usual politeness.

'Sit down, ma'am? Thank you; it is very little time I ever have for sitting down' (taking a chair), 'but I am very much obliged to you all the same—very much obliged, I am. And you say you saw Miss Clavering herself, ma'am? Ah, dear! How has she her health now, poor young lady?'

As far as Mrs Mornay could judge, she seemed very well.

'You thought so, ma'am? Yes, I dare say you did. Poor dear lady! Ah! Well, I hope she is—I hope she is. But I don't think it, ma'am, for all that.'

'She appeared strong, and in good spirits. If she was otherwise, she concealed it very well.'

'Yes, ma'am, she does. I've seen her do it. Yes, I have. She is a wonderful young lady at that; but it is too much for her sometimes—ah, dear!' She paused, and shook her head so long, that Eleanor grew quite uncomfortable. Presently, she turned, and observed so abruptly, her lodger started in her chair, 'Of course she spoke to you about me, and all I did for her?'

'I really—I think not,' said Eleanor.

'I thought she wouldn't. No! She knows I am her friend, though. Yes, she knows that. I saw—I understood her when nobody did. She had a bad fever here, ma'am, in the room below this. Very bad she was. And how do you think she got it?'

'Perhaps in visiting some of the poor streets about here,' suggested Mrs Mornay, with a furtive glance at the dark roofs visible from her window—to her imagination, an unexplored mystery of wretchedness.

'Visiting the poor streets? Oh dear no, ma'am! She didn't do that. She is a good young lady too, and liked her church, when she could get there, I don't deny. But she did not get her fever *that* way, not at all. It was a clear case to *me*, ma'am, after what I see.'

She thought her lodger would ask questions; but as Mrs Mornay said nothing, went on without.

'They took my lodgings, ma'am, at least the young gentleman did—a very nice, civil young gentleman indeed he was; and Miss Clavering and her nurse came here, and nothing was good enough for them, though I'm sure I have had ladies, who have been so pleased with all I did for them, they have come



back to me again and again. I have always been used to ladies, ma'am—always been used to them, I have. I'm keeping you, ma'am, I am afraid,' detecting a look of weariness on her listener's face, and rising to go, but, to Eleanor's disappointment, sitting down again, on her murmuring something civil, as if she had been pressed to stay.

'Her uncle came; they hadn't met since she was a babe, you know, ma'am, and I see her myself, how nervous she was, poor thing. I don't like to think evil of anybody, I never do—but he was very hard upon her that first evening—very hard he was. I heard her crying myself in her room, for I was sitting here. Well, ma'am, I didn't like that, and I said to myself, 'I guessed as much when you came, my poor dear, and I know all you're going through, for I've felt it myself, and I'll watch this night, for you'll be ill before morning.' Think of my saying that, ma'am; I'm never wrong. Well, I sat in the room next to this with my door open, and I worked and worked, and got sleepy at last, and I thought I would have a look out of window to wake me, and rest my eyes, and I looked, and what do you think I saw?'

Mrs Mornay, who was growing sleepy herself, suggested a burglar.

'No, ma'am, not a burglar; it would have been better if it had been. It was a gentleman, with a great cloak on, and his hat pulled over his face, walking up and down, looking up at my house. I got one good sight of him under the lamp, and a very handsome gentleman he was—very handsome. Well, ma'am, just as I was thinking what I should do, I heard Miss Clavering moving about, and she went into her sitting-room, and I saw him stand and look right up to her window, and I knew by his eyes she was looking at him. But such a look in any man's eyes I never saw before, and hope I never shall again—never! Well, something startled him, and he walked off, and the next morning Miss Clavering was light-headed. And nobody knew why but me. I knew. . . Yes, ma'am.'

'It was a slight circumstance to build a story on,' said Eleanor, roused by the unexpected *dénouement*.

'You think so, ma'am? Then I don't. For it was not the only one. I heard things I won't repeat. I *never* do—but I know what I know. It was as sad a case of the heart as ever I see. Yes, it was. Poor young lady! I never said anything to her about it, but she knew very well by my face that I understood her as nobody did—nobody. Ah, well, well!

Good evening, Mrs Mornay. I hope you will find yourself comfortable. I always find my ladies *is* comfortable, and they always say they consider me their friend.'

With this parting sentence she withdrew, and Eleanor heard her sighing all the way down the first flight of stairs. She could almost have fancied she heard her shake her head.

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## CHAPTER XX.

### MRS ATTERBURY HEARS OF SOMETHING TO HER ADVANTAGE:

ELEANOR thought it was of no use to call on Mrs Cummings before the middle of the day; and as she was anxious to avoid all unnecessary publicity, she thankfully accepted the offer of her friend, Mrs Mackay, to undertake the recovery of her portmanteau. The forenoon being thus at her own disposal, she ventured under the protection of a dark veil and large shawl, to obey the summons of the Abbey bell, secure that of those she dreaded meeting none would be present there. The comfort thus imbibed heartened her for her visit; and even then, it was with considerable repugnance that she once more applied at that inhospitable door. Mrs Cummings had arrived early, and had evidently lost no time; for Eleanor, being shown into the dining-room, found her carrying on an animated discussion with a small, keen-looking personage on the subject of her daughter's outfit—a discussion which had just reached a point when it might be said to be almost acrimonious.

'In one word, then, Miss Oliver, you refuse to accommodate me. I am only sorry I have troubled you at all. I shall know another time how to depend on your civil speeches.'

'The trouble, ma'am, is nothing; but to expect to be supplied with the best of everything, on terms that would scarcely pay for the worst, is rather unreasonable, and I cannot pretend to do it. I might as well close my establishment at once.'

'And you *will*, depend upon it, if you go on charging your best customers at such an exorbitant rate. Now, pray do not let me have any more discussion. There is an end of it. I

am very sorry, but I must make other arrangements. Oh, good morning, Mrs Mornay. I am very glad to see you. Jane, show Miss Oliver out.'

Miss Oliver whisked out of the room with the air of one who had come cleverly through a great danger; and Mrs Cummings threw herself into a seat, quite out of breath.

'The rapacity of these tradespeople is becoming perfectly frightful. After all the good custom I have got for that woman, to persist in saying she can make no difference between me and anybody else—it is positively monstrous! Ah, Mrs Mornay, what a trying thing it is to be a mother! No one knows what I went through about that poor dear child whom you nursed so kindly. I believe I may safely say, those who watched her did not suffer half as much in mind or body as I did; I never slept, and could not rest by day; indeed, we had no time for rest, moving about as we did from one place to another, engaged all day, and out every evening. And now I have the trial before me of parting with two of my girls, and all this worry and fatigue, to say nothing of the expense, which to me is a very, very great consideration. I really do not know what I shall do.'

Eleanor politely offered her congratulations, and asked when the weddings were to be. Oh, one was uncertain, and the other was not till the spring; but being in town, she had begun making inquiries and preparations, as there was a great deal to do.

'If I only knew of some clever, superior needlewoman, whom I could trust to undertake the plain work at my house, with the help of the maids, and my girls' village scholars, I would gladly have it all done at home. It would be a good winter's work, and a very comfortable situation for a respectable person; a work-room and bed-room to herself, and her meals, of course, in private. I know a friend of mine who always arranges like that, and has fitted out three daughters in the handsomest manner. It would save me a great expense, and relieve me of a great deal of anxiety.'

There was a pause; Eleanor, whom she had not yet asked to sit down, looked steadily at her, to make sure of her meaning. Mrs Cummings turned to her portfolio, and took out a letter.

'My dear aunt wrote to me about you, Mrs Mornay, expressing herself very kindly—very kindly indeed—and begging me to do something towards helping you on in the

world. I am very ready and willing, I am sure ; but I am, compared with many, a poor, struggling woman myself, and can only offer help in the shape of employment. Indeed, I make it a principle never to give any other.'

'Certainly, madam ; I should never think of asking it. I was not aware——'

'That Mrs Sydney had written ? No, I suppose not. But she tells me (and it is highly to your credit) that you are sensible enough not to confine yourself to one occupation. When music fails, you try something else.'

'I have found it necessary to do so, certainly.'

'May I ask what that was ?'

'I accidentally met with an opportunity of obtaining employment in plain needlework, but it was only for a short time. It is a precarious way of living, if one can get anything better.'

'It ought not to be, if all the houses charge like Miss Oliver. But then the pay they give is wretchedly small ; the profit goes into their own pockets. Now, a private order brings the whole into your own.'

'Very true.'

'You are a pretty good workwoman, are you not ?'

'I believe I may call myself so, without presumption.'

'And you understand cutting out, and taking patterns, and all that ?'

'Yes. When I was some years younger, I took great interest in a sewing-school, and spent sometime in making myself mistress of the details. In teaching others I learned what I have since found very useful.'

'No doubt. Well now, Mrs Mornay, to come to the point—you have no musical engagements at present, I understand ?'

'No. I lost my pupils from the scarletina being in the house, and I have not heard of any others.'

'Have you any prospects at present in London ?'

'None whatever.'

'Then what is to hinder our coming to an understanding at once ? If you have lost one employment through one of my girls, it is the least the others can do to supply its place ; and, to make a long story short, if you like to undertake this work on reasonable terms (we shall not quarrel about them, I dare say), and will be content to come down to my quiet home for the winter, there it is for you. It is not every one I would receive into my domestic circle without a refer-

ence, but all I hear of you convinces me you will not give me reason to repent my confidence.'

Eleanor stood thinking. It was an offer that had few recommendations in itself; but it was work, retirement, board and lodging, for several months, and would save her from drawing on the small fund which she reserved for emergencies, but could not bear to touch. Since her recovery to health, she had lived entirely on her earnings, and while it allowed her, would continue to do so. What the employment was, mattered comparatively little. Still, this was not the employer she would have chosen, and she thought of Arthur's warning, and hesitated.

Mrs Cummings thought she was diffident of her powers, and graciously assured her she would make every allowance; of course she did not expect such work as Miss Oliver would supply, as she could not afford Miss Oliver's price; and with that propounded her own—about two-thirds less than the worker had a right to expect, and so much less than Eleanor had herself paid to others, that she involuntarily smiled.

I will consider of it, madam, and let you know this evening. Thank you for your intended kindness in the offer. If I accept it, you may be sure I will do my best to give you full satisfaction. Yes,' she thought, as she walked home with somewhat hasty steps, 'if I do her work at low wages, I shall at least be paying her something. And yet—can I ever go through it?'

Mrs Mackay was waiting to receive her. She had forgotten to mention, in the flutter she was in yesterday, that her husband's papers had all been put in the hands of a clever gentleman, who had come on purpose to inquire into the matter a year ago, and whom she had never heard from, though she had called at his office a many times. To-day, however, after fetching the portmanteau, she had been down to him again and worried till she saw him, and told him she must have the papers back, as a lady wanted them most particular. He asked some questions, very sharp and short, and at last told her the papers were put by; his clerk should look them out, and call upon the lady with them in the course of the afternoon. But, dear heart, she was afraid there was nothing to be done. And she went off into a long burst of lamentation, which effectually checked the reproof on Eleanor's lips, for the indiscretion of giving her address to a stranger. She sent her away at last, rather consoled, and was just trying

to get a little rest, when she was told a gentleman was in the parlour, with some papers that he must deliver into her own hands. Forgetting fatigue in benevolence, she hastened downstairs, and found herself alone with Mr Martock.

She had always feared this man, at a time when she could imagine no cause for doing so ; but now that she had but too many reasons for believing in his enmity, it amounted to positive terror. She would have retreated had there been time, but the door was closed, and he was standing before it, and any attempt at escape must have been made at a sacrifice of dignity. Before she had recovered her presence of mind he had placed her on a seat, and stood leaning against the table close by, watching every change in her face.

'It is a long time, Mrs Atterbury, since I had the honour of waiting on you last.'

'It would have been longer still, sir,' she said, gaining courage from indignation, 'if you had waited till I wished for your visit. Any intercourse between us should be carried on through my solicitor, Mr. Shannon.'

'Certainly. Mr. Shannon is, however, out of town at present, engaged on some important affairs of his own, that I fear are likely to give him some trouble. Whether because he is not so clever about his own as about other people's, or whether, because his zeal for others leads him into difficulties with those who have annoyance in their power, I cannot take upon me to say.'

There was a short silence ; Eleanor was considering what this could mean. She had been fearing lately that her old friend was harassed ; what should she do if it were caused by his loyalty to her ?

'I called, Mrs Atterbury, to bring you these papers referring to the man Mackay. You remember, no doubt, asking my advice in the matter, and that I promised you I would inquire what steps the wife must take in such a case ?'

Remember it ? Yes. The whole scene was present with her in a moment : the sound of the waves on the beach—the tune that her husband whistled over his drawing—the angry scorn with which he gnashed his teeth at the very promise alluded to. She understood its meaning now, as he did then.

'I am sorry you ever had anything to do with anything or anybody I cared about, Mr Martock. You never will again, if I can help it.'

'So I have been made to understand. I can only say I

am sorry, and bow to your decision. You have not heard from Sir John Pierpoint lately—have you?’

‘I do not know where he is.’

‘Indeed? Well, he is at Boulogne, I fear, in very reduced circumstances. Poor Sir John! It was not altogether his fault, but he had been imprudent, and has suffered for it at last.’

She felt, as he meant she should, that this, too, was her doing, but she could make no reply.

‘Despard, of course, you know, has been obliged to leave the country.’

‘I was not aware of it, but I am not surprised.’

‘You are not surprised? You were aware of some of his difficulties?’

‘Of some of them.’

‘He applied to you, probably, for assistance?’

She was silent, but her silence told as much as he wanted to know.

‘He chose to offend those who might have kept his head above water, and therefore they let him go down, and he had nothing for it but to fly. By the way, that amiable landlady of yours—you remember her? She has been sold up for an old debt which she believed had been paid years ago, poor woman. She was not deficient in common sense, but she made a mistake sometimes.’

Eleanor knew as well as if he had said it, that he was telling her this to show her his power. He had ruined, or was ruining, every one who crossed his will in her behalf, and now she was alone with him, to struggle as best she might. Still she was silent, and kept her face shaded from him with her hand and arm.

‘May I ask, without being indiscreet, if you have had any tidings of Mr Atterbury since I saw you?’

‘You know I have not,’ was her almost inaudible reply.

‘How should I know? The mail that brought me intelligence might possibly have conveyed some to you.’

‘You have heard from him, then?’ she cried, starting up. ‘Oh, when? Where was he? Why did you not let me know?’

‘Madam, you referred me to your solicitor for all communications in matters of business, and I was not disposed to enter upon any other subjects with him. Yes, I have heard twice of your husband. He seems to have changed

his mind about California, for my correspondent heard of him in the States—I forget the name of the place—where he had got a situation, which he unfortunately lost.’

‘Did you hear how?’

‘Why, yes—on his name being discovered. There are some there who know his history, and one or two who know his person. I fear he will find his own name as great an encumbrance as—you do.’

She held her hands tightly together, to stop their trembling. ‘Was that all?’

‘That was all; but even that is better than nothing, is it not?’

‘Oh, I have prayed so for one word to tell me he was alive; and you have known this how long?’

‘Not very long. If I had known where to address you, I would have told you at once. I will never do so through Mr Shannon, or anybody.’

‘Do you expect to hear of him again?’

‘Indeed, I do. My correspondents have strict directions to obtain all the news of him that they can.’

‘Can you tell me where a letter will find him?’

‘No, that I cannot do. But I will endeavour to ascertain for you.’

‘And you will let me know when you do hear?’

‘If you give me your address. Come, Mrs Atterbury, you were always open and truthful; tell me the whole truth now. Why have you distrusted me?’

‘How can you ask? You know it was your own doing.’

‘I am still in the dark. When did I lose your confidence?’

‘When I found out you were deceiving me.’

‘How did I deceive you?’

‘You made me believe what you knew to be untrue. You kept my husband’s flight from me, and schemed how to get into your own hands the money intended for his creditors. That alone would be sufficient.’

‘Without entering into the merits of that question, how did you learn all this?’

‘From your own conversation with Sir John.’

‘You were listening, then, Mrs Atterbury?’

‘Against my will, I was. I could not help it. I was taken to your house without my own consent, when I was very ill, and when your voices roused me, I was too much



overcome to make any attempt to interrupt you. I heard all that passed, and took my resolution from that moment to trust none of you again.'

'And having taken that resolution, what was your first step?'

'I left your house. I dreaded your detaining me, and in some way forcing me to yield, as you had forced Sir John. Your garden-gate was open—I escaped by the window.'

'Why not by the door?'

'The door into the hall was locked.'

'Then you went into my study?'

'I did.'

'You went up to my table?'

'Yes.'

'You took something that you saw there?'

The colour rose brightly into her cheeks as she replied, 'I know I was wrong, but it was a terrible temptation.'

'I admit it. Come, be honest with me; you thought that packet contained what would do your husband mischief, and so you felt justified in destroying it.'

'No, I did not think of that. I only carried it into the next room.'

'And then?'

'Then I escaped, as I told you.'

'And the packet?'

'The packet I never saw again, or heard of, till this minute. I left it behind me.'

'Take care, Mrs Atterbury—take care! Do not presume on my indulgence. I wish to deal gently with you, but I must have the whole truth.'

'I never speak any other, sir.'

'I have always thought so. Prove it to me now. If you did not destroy it yourself, who did?'

'What do you mean?'

'Mean? It is plain enough. Who met you? Who was with you? Who knew you were there?'

'I am not aware that any one knew. I was quite alone then, and went alone to Mr Tresham's. Why do you look as if you doubted me?'

'Mrs Atterbury, that packet I left on the table when I locked the outer door. When I unlocked it, the room smelt of burnt paper, and the air was full of the charred fragments—but the packet was gone.'

She was shocked beyond the power of expression. 'Is it possible?' she said, at last. 'Are you sure it is not somewhere in the room?'

'Do you think I have not searched both rooms well long ago? There were papers among them of such importance that no money can compensate their loss, madam, I can tell you that.'

'But, Mr Martock, you surely believe me. What have I ever done, that you should think I would dare to tell you an untruth?'

'It matters little what I think, Mrs Atterbury. The question is, how would a magistrate look at it?'

'A magistrate?'

'Yes, madam. Your own sense must point out that if this case were made public, nothing could save you from the consequences.'

She might well tremble at such a threat. He was capable, she believed now, of anything towards those who opposed his will; he might even be wantonly cruel enough for this. She sank back in the chair whence she had risen, unable to speak, or to take her eyes from his.

'Well, madam!' he said, finding her silent, 'what have you to say now?'

'Only this—I have told you the truth.'

'Can you prove it?'

'I do not know. I was alone. God knows it is truth; but if you doubt my word, why should you believe my oath?'

'Have you named the circumstance to any one?'

'I think not. I may have told Mr Shannon—I cannot be sure.'

'Well, it is safe with him, at any rate for your sake. I have not yet made my loss public. Believing you guilty, I wished to spare you if possible; I wish it still more, now that I find that guilt, at any rate doubtful. Yes, madam, I repeat doubtful; for till the mystery is cleared, you can expect me to admit nothing more.'

'This amounts to insult, Mr Martock. I must endure it, having no protector, but I could not have believed you would forget yourself so far.'

He turned upon her with fierceness that made her shrink as if a fire had suddenly flashed up into her face. 'Forget myself, woman? Think of what *you* are, and in what estimation you would be held, if I dragged you before the public to-mor-

row, on such a charge ! Beg my forbearance on your knees, if you will ; but no grand airs with me now—all that comes too late. You are no more able to contend with me than a worm under my foot, and you had better own it, before it crushes you !’

She had bent for a moment beneath this unexpected violence, but if he hoped to frighten her into abject submission he was mistaken. The dignity roused her courage, and though she was deadly pale, she met his angry eye without flinching.

‘ You may crush me by ill-treatment—I do not deny that, sir, if you have the heart to do so ; but it is not the less unmanly. I am in God’s hands, and if I am to be unjustly accused dreadful as it will be, He will help me to bear it, as I have borne other misery. I only repeat I have spoken the truth.’

He walked a few steps across the room, and then returned.

‘ Madam, I hope so. I sincerely hope so.’ He took her hand. ‘ I have been harsh to you—I regret it. Do not be afraid ; you deserve better treatment. Ah !’ for the tears were now dropping fast from her eyes, ‘ you have suffered enough this last twelvemonth to satisfy your worst enemy, if you ever had one ; and you will suffer still more, unless matters change considerably. How is it, it has not killed you already ?’

She dashed away her tears with her disengaged hand. ‘ I did not mean to give way—I did not intend to move your pity—but you tried me hard, and I am not strong. Pray let me go.’

‘ I see you are not strong.’ He still retained her hand in his, and felt her pulse. ‘ What have you been doing ?’

‘ I have been working first in one way, then in another.’

‘ Have you nothing to live upon ?’

‘ I kept a sum in reserve that I might not be a burden to any one, and I had an expensive illness, which took the greater part of it. Since then I have had employment enough to maintain me.’

‘ On what ? On weak tea and water gruel ? You will barely earn that if you are left to yourself much longer. I never would have allowed this had you remained under my care. No one should have allowed it. Whatever you gave up, you ought to have kept a home over your head. What must your friends and relatives think of such strange conduct ?’

‘ I am accountable to none of them. I have done what I believed to be my duty.’

'That is to say, you have thrown away your usefulness, your independence, your place in society, for what? What good has your sacrifice done? If any distressing case comes before you now, what can you do to relieve it? There are many I could name—sad cases, too—and if you were still in easy circumstances, you might be of immense service; now you will soon need help yourself.'

'I hope not; I must be hard driven to ask it. I try to save all I can, that I may meet any urgent claims. Do not tell me any particulars now—I have not courage to hear them.'

'But why do you not communicate with your father's family? You have some wealthy relations in India, I know.'

'I have, but Mr Ormonde has children of his own. I know but little of him, and have no claim on him, whatever.'

'But if he knew that you and your husband were in extremity, he would come forward for the credit of the family, of course?'

'No, sir,' she said, quickly, 'for he will not be applied to.'

'You think not? If Atterbury returns to Europe, broken in health and spirits, hoping to be sheltered by your tenderness in some secure, quiet resting-place—stranger things have happened—what can you do for him now?'

'If I can do nothing else, I can encourage him, by my example, to endure anything rather than do wrong. God will help those who trust Him.'

'Woman like!' he said, shrugging his shoulders. 'When you wish to avoid a disagreeable alternative, you sit down, and talk of *trusting*.'

'Ah, sir, without that help I should not be sitting here to talk of anything.'

'Then your trust has ended in your being put into my hands—at my mercy?'

'At your mercy I certainly am, as far as annoyance goes; but it may be to give you an opportunity of being good to me. Indeed, Mr Martock, a little forbearance on your part will be a merciful action. I know you can harass me cruelly if you choose, but if you will spare me at least for the present, I shall be grateful. I never wronged you in my life.'

'Well,' he said, 'I wish to believe that; and since you appeal to my forbearance, I will promise you shall not be annoyed if I can help it. If it should happen that I am called upon to account for any paper lost in that packet, I may be

obliged to appeal to your testimony ; but that I hope, will not be the case. Of course it will be for your interest and security that the real culprit should be discovered as soon as possible.'

'Certainly.'

'And I must beg the favour of your keeping me informed of your movements, so that I may always know where to find you.'

'Is that necessary ?'

'No, not necessary ; but it will save me the expense and trouble of tracing and watching you. I would rather leave you on parole. You understand me ?'

'Quite. You shall hear from me.'

'I shall consider it an honour. And as soon as I have any news to convey, I will make a point of doing so.'

'Thank you. Is this all you wish to say ?'

'One more thing ; if you are in any difficulty in which I can be of service, I will attend you anywhere on the shortest notice.'

'You are very good ; while Mr Shannon lives, I trust not to encroach on your politeness.'

'Ah, poor Mr Shannon ! He is a well-meaning man. I am very sorry for him—very.'

'On what account ?'

'Have you not heard ? No, I suppose not. He is entangled in a harassing lawsuit, that will, I am afraid, be given against him, owing to his own obstinacy. There is only one person who can help him now, and he will neither accept his interference, nor follow his advice, out of delicacy to *you*.'

'What can I have to do with it ? Who is the person of whom you speak ?'

'Myself. Mr Shannon would consider it treason to you, if he took as much as a hint from me. So his ruin is certain.'

'What ? everybody ruined on my account ? even this, my last, best friend ? I know what all this means—you need not attempt to explain. How am I to persuade him ?'

'Well, if you wish to do so, you might give me a line to him, which might induce him to allow me to arrange a compromise, that will save him a good deal of money. Here are pen and paper ; one line will be enough to satisfy his scruples.'

'And if you do him this service, what shall you expect in return ?'

'On my own account, nothing ; on *his*, I would just

point out, that the less he is perplexed with your affairs, the better (excuse my frankness) it will be for both of you.'

'I thought that was what you meant; but I will do it. I have no right to let him injure himself for me.'

She wrote in haste, and with a trembling hand :

'DEAR FRIEND,—

'I hear that you scruple to avail yourself of Mr Martock's advice, on my account. Pray set that consideration aside entirely. Any service he does to you I shall look upon as done to myself. You have borne enough for me and mine. I shall never forgive myself if you suffer in consequence.

'Yours ever gratefully,

'E. M. A.'

She folded, and gave it to Mr Martock unsealed. He bowed as he received it, and there was a faint tinge on his face of irrepressible triumph.

'You will remain here, I conclude, for the present?'

'You shall hear, sir, if I do not. I must beg you now to leave me.'

She curtsied to him as she spoke, with a dignity that checked his attempt to take her hand again.

Her courage held out as long as he was present; and she contrived to regain her room: how far she gave way there, we need not inquire. Hers was the courage of Esther, that would carry her into the jaws of a peril, at which her very heart was in anguish for fear.

That evening she closed with Mrs Cummings's proposal, and that lady being unexpectedly summoned home, she left town without seeing Mr Martock again.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### SALARY NO OBJECT COMPARED WITH A COMFORTABLE HOME.

MRS CUMMINGS might well hasten home, for she had received intelligence that a robbery had been committed on her

premises ; principally of plate and household linen. It had been so cleverly done, that it was impossible not to suspect connivance in some one acquainted with the house and its treasures ; and her heart misgave her as she thought of a certain cheap cook, engaged with a doubtful character on the strength of her low wages, and dismissed, vowing vengeance, after three months' fierce animosity, and the disappearance of nearly all the stores that came in her way. The linen was a special treasure, the pride of her heart, and almost the only valuable within the plunderer's reach ; the amount of plate being comparatively small. Mrs Cummings could bear some trials pretty well ; she had really been remarkably patient when Milly was ill, and nursed without giving her any trouble ; but to be robbed in this wholesale manner went very near her heart, and she could not recover her equanimity at all. Other considerations were thrown aside—everything else was sacrificed to the one object of reaching the scene of disaster as soon as possible ; and Derrick, who had not succeeded in getting another place, was easily persuaded to forget and forgive and remain for the present—a very agreeable circumstance for Mrs Mornay, who travelled with her, second-class.

If there was anything overstrained or morbid in Eleanor's state of feeling at this time, it brought its own penance with it. She had told herself often that she was contented that it should be so ; that she accepted her fallen position, and only wished to do her duty in it ; that she was safer from discovery, and that where she durst not give her real name, she had no right to stand on a level with those who had nothing to hide ; but not the less unpleasant did she find it to put up with Derrick's ill-humour all through the journey, and be at her mercy for necessary comforts at the end of it. In the general confusion and excitement of the first arrival, and the judicial inquiry that began at once, nobody had time or leisure to think of the stranger. Mrs Cummings gave a general order that she was to be made comfortable, but did not inquire whether she was or not : indeed would have thought it rather strange if anybody was, when she had been robbed of what had cost her hard money, and no clue afforded to the detection of the thief. So wretched was that first evening and night, that but for Milly's help, who, finding everybody cross and every place uncomfortable, came to her to be petted, and thus drew her out of herself, Eleanor's heart must have failed her at the onset. Things mended a little next day ; Mrs Cummings soon

filled her hands with work, and from that time she was much too busy to have time to grow dispirited.

The missing necessities of domestic life had to be replaced somehow or other, and the lady soon congratulated herself on having secured so willing a slave. There really was some pleasure in giving Mrs Mornay a stiff job ; she went about it so cleverly, and with such good will, and sympathized in her employer's trouble as if it had been her own. The motive that urged her fingers to toil so loyally was, of course, beyond penetration, but the result spoke for itself. Her skill and industry gradually won the admiration of the servants—good judges, some of them in the article of labour—and her manners as effectually gained their respect. It was to no purpose that her dress was so dark and plain, and her close cap, as Arthur Sydney had observed, so like that of an hospital nurse. They did not know why, but they felt she was a lady, and though they neglected her comfort, they treated her with uniform civility.

Comfort, as a rule, was considered an expensive luxury at the Grove ; and expensive luxuries, except under special circumstances, Mrs Cummings looked upon as next to a sin. What nobody had, nobody could expect to have ; and if she did without superfluities herself, it was not for her servants to think them necessary. The process of growing accustomed to be uncomfortable was a trying one, and few of her retainers found their patience and temper hold out many months ; changes were incessant, and those who were not actually going were generally in a state of irritation and discontent, that found vent wherever there was opportunity. The young ladies shared it to a certain degree ; Milly, when her health was restored, perhaps a little sooner returned to school ; but the two brides elect, in whose service Eleanor was now engaged, were by no means enthusiastic about their home arrangements, and openly declare they should manage differently when they were their own mistresses. They were not bad-hearted girls, but they had no idea of considering anybody but themselves, and Eleanor had been several weeks under their roof before they addressed a single word to her that did not immediately relate to their own affairs. They had not a fault to find with her—she was always civil, always obliging, never obstinate in her own opinion, and yet a wonderful authority in taste and new patterns—but she was only a needle woman, and what in the world should they talk to her about ?



Mrs Cummings had kept her word in giving her an airy work-room ; as the autumn advanced, it became almost too airy ; the wind whistled in the chimney long before the discipline of the Grove admitted of a fire being lighted ; and through the greater part of October it was cold enough to give poor Eleanor a taste of hardship for which she was not prepared. India and Devonshire had not been bracing schools for a frame that was far from robust ; and she suffered, during that interval, more than any one had any idea of. She made no complaint ; she knew she could not resign her situation without expense, and the risk, at that late season, of not obtaining another. Her hardships were less than what others might be bearing through Fredericks fall ; so she endured in silence ; and when the first of November came, the household were allowed fires to sit by. Unluckily fuel was a favourite economy of Mrs Cummings, and though coals were cheap in her country she had no notion of their being treated as a matter of course. The stringent laws about size and measure, and the battles with servants to secure the best pieces for the drawing-room, led to the work-room coming in for the worst, and often in too scanty quantities. It was nobody's business to provide them, and so nobody took any trouble about it. This one annoyance, which she had no power to remedy, was, perhaps, Eleanor's greatest trial. It cost her more struggles after patience and courage than the harder ones she had already borne. There was an unkindness, an unnecessary cruelty in it, that hurt her sensibly ; and yet the people who did it were influenced more by a general feeling of ill-humour than any personal ill-will. They were teased and scolded, and grudged firing themselves ; it was some relief to vent it upon her ; if they had been treated differently, their hearts would have softened in proportion.

The cold, the confinement, the long solitary hours of monotonous occupation, the absence of any cheering society, any break to her own sad thoughts, had the injurious effect that might have been expected. She struggled against it for some time, but finding her strength giving way beneath days of morbid brooding and nights of nervous horror, she was obliged at last to represent to Mrs Cummings that unless she could have a short time allowed her for exercise and recreation, she was afraid her health would not suffer her to remain. Mrs Cummings would have done a great deal sooner than lose her just then, so she graciously acceded to the terms ; and Mrs

Mornay, instead of once a week, was made free, if she pleased to walk for an hour every day.

There was not much choice in the way of pleasant rambles, for the country was flat and uninteresting, except to a strictly agricultural eye, and the muddy lanes had lost their one attraction of being green. But Eleanor was not the less thankful for the respite, and persevered in her daily walk, in defiance of the weather. She was not long in making up her mind what that walk should be. The young clergyman, who had come to this parish with a host of excellent schemes and plans for its rapid improvement, had been there long enough already to have learned patience from disappointment; and it was partly from principle, partly from sturdy courage, partly as a kind of hoping against hope, that he persisted in two daily services, when five made the utmost extent of his congregation. These services, condemned by some, neglected by others, and from circumstances unavailing to many, were to Eleanor a privilege beyond price; the morning, indeed, was generally lost to her, but she had no difficulty in making her recreation hour suit that of the afternoon, and had just time to walk there and back. Mr Fenton, who had long been sore on the subject of the services, felt quite grateful to the new face he now saw there so regularly: and his inquiries about the stranger only added to the interest he had begun to feel. As opportunity offered, he showed her a few civilities, lent her an umbrella one wet day, and once, on a sudden fog coming on, insisted on escorting her part of the way home. The little that passed between them confirmed his favourable opinion! and convinced there was some sad story in the background, he suggested to his wife that a little kindness from her would not be out of place. Mrs Fenton, though ready enough to be kind wherever she could, did not exactly see what she could do for any one in Mrs Cummings's employment, unless with Mrs Cummings consent and approval, and that she was too busy to solicit. She thought Mrs Mornay was very pretty, and certainly superior to her station, but still she was at a loss how to show her any kindness, beyond recommending her to other employers when her present one had no more occasion for her services. There the matter ended for the time, and soon after Mrs Cummings came down to the school, and as she had done before, picked out two of the elder girls to work at her house—a style of charity much in favour with this excellent lady, and for which she received much credit. Mrs Fenton, being

present at the time, took the opportunity of inquiring a little about the intended teacher of the girls. She had noticed her punctual attendance and quiet behaviour at church, and her husband had been pleased with her manner, but she wished to feel sure it was all right. Was there any mystery about her? Did Mrs Cummings know her story?

'Oh dear no; I only know she is an excellent creature, and so really grateful for the little kindness I have shown her, she would do anything for me. I know nothing of her past life and have made a point of not inquiring; but there can be no doubt of her having had a good education. I am doing the best I can for her, in giving her a home and work for the winter; and that is what I call charity, Mrs Fenton. I may lose by it in the end, but I would not employ one of your fashionable outfitting warehouses, that screw their workers to the lowest penny—not if they would make my girls' things for nothing!'

'Well, I do not know. They employ a great many hands, and I have understood some of them pay fair wages, and take great care of their people.'

'Don't believe it. They charge you enormously, and put the money in their own pockets. Trust me, I know them pretty well. Have you ever been into my work-room, Mrs Fenton? It really is worth your while to pay it a visit. We have got things in order now, and I think you will say we set you a good example.'

Mrs Fenton did think so when she came, though it was some time first. Eleanor's orderly habits and correct eye had certainly made her apartment a very different place from what it had formerly been. She had had many discouragements and much ill-will to contend against; but her patience had not been wasted; and the very housemaid, who had quarrelled as if she had been the one to make it so. The school-girls, too, found a difference; they knew a lady's voice and manner as well as anybody; and shy, awkward, and troublesome as they were at first, soon grew devotedly attached to her person, and jealousies covetous of her smiles and praise. Left alone with them sometimes for a couple of hours, she would, when they were tractable and industrious, amuse them and herself out of the stores of her memory; repeating poetry, telling stories, describing foreign scenes, and adventures of travel, or relating anecdotes of her Devonshire poor. Now and then, though it was a favour for which she had seldom heart, and with which

her old cough too often interfered, she would sing to them—such singing as they had never heard in their lives, and which gave their untutored organs the delight of a new sensation. They talked so much of Mrs Mornay to their parents and school-fellows, that a considerable degree of curiosity was gradually diffused among the people, in which Mrs Fenton, without confessing it, began to share. She came, in the beginning of December, to make some arrangements with Mrs Cummings, and finding only the young ladies at home, begged to be allowed to see the work-room. They wondered how she could care to do so, but introduced her without hesitation, reflecting that the wedding-clothes, at any rate, were something to see, if there was nothing else. It was not the hour when the pupils attended, and Eleanor was setting at the window, to get all the light she could on a piece of fine stitching, such as only her fingers could accomplish as she liked to see it done. She rose on the entrance of the ladies, and understanding the reason of the visit, placed chairs by the fire, and stood quietly waiting their orders. Miss Cummings, naturally full of her own prospects, went on talking to Mrs Fenton about her wedding arrangements, and took no notice of her workwoman, except to ask her for patterns, or to appeal to her about price and quantity. Her sister Sophy, less absorbed in the subject—her own marriage being still an unsettled thing—had leisure to observe that Mrs Mornay had a cough, and was not looking very well. So much for rushing to church in all weathers! Eleanor owned to a slight cold—she did not think it necessary to explain that it was owing to her coming in wet and chilled, and finding the fire out, as usual. Mrs Fenton hoped the church was not in fault, as Mrs Mornay's regular attendance was a pattern to the parish.

'I am sure, Mrs Mornay,' she added, with a pleasant smile, 'if you knew what good it had done Mr Fenton, after all the discouragement he has had, you would be glad you went, setting higher motives aside.'

Eleanor spoke as she felt of the benefit to herself, observing it was a privilege she had not expected to find, and that she owed much to the consideration of Mrs Cummings in enabling her to enjoy it.

'The fact is,' said Sophia, 'if we were half as good as we ought to be, we should go too; but somehow, one doesn't. I am sure I don't know why. I dare say, though Mrs Mornay goes as much for a little variety as for anything else.'

'It is just possible,' said Mrs Mornay, with a quiet smile, that she could not suppress.

'Ah!' observed Mrs Fenton, with a glance round the room, 'and a very good reason too. It is the fact of its making a variety from every-day matters that gives it its value. But whatever Mrs Mornay's motives, we must not let her risk her health in the cause. I am sorry to hear that cough. You are not used to our damp, cold evenings, I dare say.'

'They are very cold,' said Eleanor, with a shiver.

'You are accustomed to a milder climate perhaps?'

'Yes, ma'am.' Her reserve had returned in an instant, and she began busily folding the patterns she had spread on the table. Sophia looked at Mrs Fenton with a significant shrug of her shoulders, and good-naturedly changing the conversation, drew the notice of the visitor to the excellence of the work; a hint which the latter was too well-bred not to take.

It was only a small part of her attention, however, that the incumbent's wife gave to the delicate stitches; the delicate worker was much more interesting in her eyes, and when she could do so unobserved, she watched her narrowly. Never had Eleanor made a greater mistake than in supposing she would attract less notice in a humble station than if she maintained her claims to gentility: like Queen Mary's white hands under her laundress's plaid, her manner betrayed her directly she spoke, and only served to make the contrast more palpable. Mrs Fenton sat considering who and what she could be; and while keeping up a civil conversation about the two pupils' rapid improvement, and sewing-schools in general, wondered more and more whether all were right with this fair and engaging stranger, so evidently belonging to a very different sphere.

'If she is what she pretends to be, where is her husband? what is his occupation? Has she left him, or has he left her, or what?' she asked, not unnaturally, when talking it over with a neighbour afterwards; and being a frank open woman, perhaps she talked it over a little more freely than was quite necessary. It takes some experience to teach us how much cleverer silence often is than speech. At any rate, the neighbour being to the full as curious as herself, discussed it freely in the next house she visited, with a few slight additions, that gave a dash of mystery to the story. It quickly circulated in the neighbourhood that there was a mystery in the business; and Mrs Mornay could not show herself at church, or else-

where, without being more stared at than she would at all have liked, had it occurred to her to observe it.

Mrs Fenton herself did not hold these doubts very long.

She had her share of this world's blessings, in her husband and little ones, her home and her parish, with their mingled duties and attachments ; but they brought her a share of its troubles as well, and at times were almost a burden. Her husband's ideas were noble, and his means limited ; his taste was fastidious, and his self-denying principle strict ; and the difficulty she had in pleasing his eye and palate without infringing on his rule—of keeping up the air of intellectual refinement that was his native element without increasing expenses or leaving homely work undone, might have perplexed a bolder genius than hers. But her greatest burden was the Church psalmody. By stirring up college friends, and moving every stone he could lay a finger upon, Mr Fenton had contrived to get a very fair organ ; but an organist's hire was beyond his means. He considered, it, in fact, out of the question: his wife had learned the piano, and it stood to sense she could play the organ with a little practice. Anybody could. And as he must know best, Mrs Fenton, who knew nothing about it, supposed it was quite true, and undertook the office cheerfully. Considering that she had never been much of a performer on the instrument she *did* know, it might have been doubted whether she would succeed on the one she did not ; but that did not occur to either of them. It was right that she should be the organist, so an organist she became, and the amount of misery she went through in consequence, no tongue could tell. She was one of those otherwise harmless people, whom nothing can make musical : and being always anxious and frightened, and always aware that her husband's ear was quivering at every false note she made, it was only by hard dragging through difficulties and failures that she ever brought her Sunday performances to a decent close. Again and again she deplored her inefficiency, feeling it the more, that Mr Fenton never breathed a syllable that could imply he had a fault to find, and decidedly ignored all meek suggestions that it would be better to have no music at all than to have it ill-done. His theory was, that you are to do what you can, not what you can't ; and unless she could find a substitute, there was nothing for it but to persevere. A substitute—such as would satisfy him and herself—she had despaired of ever finding, till one Sunday morning, when she was really so

unwell she could hardly keep her seat, Mrs Mornay unexpectedly came up to her just before the service, remarked with much concern how ill she looked, and earnestly begged permission to take her place. A few inquiries followed, and it appeared she knew the organ well, and was only too glad to have her fingers upon it; and the sounds she brought out that morning were quite sufficient proof of her assertion. People who had never thought about the organ at all before, except as a mild accompaniment to the singers, began to look up, and listen, and wonder they had not noticed it sooner; the village choir caught the inspiring influence, and sang with better effect than usual; and Mr Fenton, whose eyes had glistened with pleasure more than once, waylaid Eleanor as she left the church to give her his warm tribute of praise.

'We want such gifts as yours, sadly,' he said; 'our service is not what I should like it to be yet, and I can find no one with the necessary ability who will devote it to this work. My wife is over-tasked, and cannot do everything. It was a real kindness to save her to-day.'

'Indeed,' replied Eleanor, 'it was such a pleasure to myself, I can hardly accept your thanks. It is so long since I touched the instrument, I hardly knew how to leave it.'

'Then pray, whenever you wish to indulge yourself, come to me for the key. Take care I do not make you my organist, that is all.'

This, though said first in jest, became soon a matter of serious discussion. Eleanor found that no service she could render would be half as acceptable to both, and rejoiced that she had something to offer the church on which no one had a claim. Mrs Cummings, being properly consulted, was propitious, even to conceding an extra hour in the week for practising with the choir. The exertions of the new performer gave general satisfaction; and Mr Fenton began to indulge in sundry visions of choral services and anthems, such as he had long given up as hopelessly unattainable. He hunted up his best voices out of every corner of the parish; invited them to tea, coaxed, exhorted, goaded them severally and collectively, into something like zeal for the general harmony; and with a reinforcement of half a dozen boys from the school, whom he drilled daily alone, began for the first time to feel that he really had a choir. He soon found, however, that he must be careful of his valuable ally; the exertion, added to the walk twice in the day in all weathers, tried her more than he

liked to see, and it gradually became a settled thing that her Sundays should be spent at the parsonage. She could not have believed she would find this so great a boon, but so it was ; for the kindly faces, the social equality, the prattle of the little ones, and the entire change of scene and diet, were in themselves more real rest than the solitude of her work-room, and refreshed her for the week. Mrs Fenton grew as warm in her praise as she had been sceptical at first ; she pooh-poohed every doubt she had herself suggested, and was very angry when reminded she had ever mentioned them at all. Christmas came, and Mrs Cummings, according to her usual economical custom, carried her daughters on a round of visits to friends and relations, thereby obviating the distressing necessity of festivities at home ; and a week's holiday being granted to Mrs Mornay, while the ladies were absent, she spent the greater part of her time at the parsonage, where she worked for Mrs Fenton's children, as if she had been debarred from the use of her needle for a month. It was no use trying to prevent her ; and the busy young mother, who was more industrious than clever in the millinery line, was only too thankful to be taught and assisted. Mr Fenton, however, protested vehemently against this disposal of her time, and, any evening that he was disengaged, tried hard to make Handel and Mendelssohn supersede Harry's blouse and Mary's braided merino ; but if the ladies were too resolute for him, did the next best thing in his power for his guest, by reading aloud for her amusement. He had a good voice, and a keen literary taste, fresh from study and converse with men ; and it was as pleasant to him to feel he was understood and appreciated, as it was to her to hear of new books, and favourite writers, and newspapers and reviews—luxuries he had not yet schooled himself to do without, and which to Eleanor seemed now part of a world in which she had ceased to share. So pleasant were these evenings, closing with the chanted psalm, the favourite hymn, the quiet family worship, that she braved for their sakes the cold air of winter nights, when it would have been more prudent to keep at home ; and with the help of this manna in the desert, her second Christmas of worse than widowhood passed more in humble trust than in sorrow.

Mr Fenton was not without hopes that in drawing his guest into conversation, which he did whenever he had a favourable opening, he might discover a clue to her past history. He soon learned enough to convince him his conjecture as to



her station was correct, and was too much of a gentleman to entrap her into admissions she might regret. He only took an opportunity one day, when they were alone, of mentioning his readiness to serve her in any way she could point out, provided she thought fit to treat him with openness. She seemed rather startled, for the colour spread over her face as she replied, 'I wish I could—I wish I could! The necessity of not being open is one reason why I am—what you see me.'

'That is,' said he, smiling gravely, 'an accomplished lady, accustomed to good society, occupying a station below her own.'

'I can hardly say that,' she returned, with agitation. 'I am poor, and have only my own exertions to depend upon; but I can tell you nothing more. I should not tell you this much, only you are so kind to me, and I could not bear that you should think I wished to deceive you.'

'Can nothing be done? I have friends—I might obtain you some advice—I really wish you would let me help you.'

'You are very, very good; but pray say no more. I cannot, indeed I cannot,' was her only answer, with such a look of distress that nothing but a sense of duty could have enabled him to persevere. He did so, however as gently as he could, pointing out, that if there were anything on her mind that it would comfort her to confide to a friend—if she felt she had wronged any one—if there were any one with whom she would be reconciled—now was her time; this season softened all hearts, and the pain of the effort would be more than compensated by the relief. He wondered at his own courage in saying this, and kept his eyes fixed on the fire, for fear of embarrassing her by a look, almost dreading what her answer would be.

The answer was not so easy to give. She was thinking, as she had thought before, what a comfort it would be to tell her sorrowful story, if only it could be told without shame. But to name her own wrongs was to condemn him whom, at all costs, she must shield, and unless her whole plan of life were given up, she must keep her secret still. No strength that she was conscious of possessing would carry her through another such trial as she bore at Mr Tresham's; better that she should be suspected of she knew not what—better that she should lose her new-made friends, through their doubts of her truth. She felt Mr Fenton was disappointed; she knew he deserved more trust; but it could not be, and if he gave

her up, she must submit without a complaint. He, on his part, though his judgment recoiled from the mystery, could not look into the sad, innocent eyes that drooped before him beneath a shame not their own, without finding pity and sympathy prevail over every other feeling. His duty, at any rate, was done; he had no right to force her confidence, and he was too chivalrous not to be ready to believe in a woman so fair, so loveable, so desolate. He did his best to cheer her lonely life, made her free of his house, whenever she had leisure to visit it—sketched out a plan of study against she should have time to read, and begged, if there were any books she wished to borrow, she would consider his library her own. This offer she declined at first, but being surprised, soon after turning over Southey's works, owned with more nervous hesitation than the occasion seemed to require, that she was looking for a poem, called 'All for Love.' Had she read it? No, but she had been told—in short, if she might borrow that particular volume—if it was not asking too much—it would be doing her a very great favour. The favour was conceded, of course, without the smallest demur, but Mr Fenton, when he named it to his wife, could not refrain from a few remarks slightly disparaging to the good sense of women in general.

'Of all the books in the library, though I had shown her those I recommended, and which I was sure she would value and understand, she has picked out the very last I should have expected her to care for—one of Southey's wildest legendary ballads—clever enough, as everything was that he wrote, but by no means the style of reading I should have chosen for her just now. There certainly is no accounting for a woman's whims.'

Mrs Cummings was by no means indifferent to the effect produced by her protégé. The more notice Mrs Mornay attracted, the more self-complacent her patroness felt. Unconscious of the high example she was following, she gloried in Eleanor's Sunday performance as much as the great 'architect, artist, and man' did in that of Tom Pinch; and considered it was quite equivalent to a handsome Easter offering to Mr Fenton. She began to take a lively interest in the psalmody, sang audibly, very much out of tune, and looked as if she would give the world to mention that the young woman who played so well was one she employed out of charity. Her countenance *did* mention it as plainly as it could speak, and if any strangers were in the church, it was

impossible for them not to perceive there was some link between her and the organ. She made a point of having the tune brought to her pew by one of the boys, and invariably paused as she went out to whisper to Eleanor, and make it clear to all beholders not already acquainted with the fact, that that gifted serf only performed by her gracious permission. And she began seriously to consider whether it would not answer in a pecuniary point of view to secure her musical talents for Milly, instead of sending her to school after Easter.

Strangers were not common in that church, but one Sunday in February, an elderly, shabbily-dressed gentleman, whom nobody knew, appeared at the morning service—a circumstance that might have passed without much comment, had it not also happened that Mrs Mornay was either taken ill, or seized with a fit of nervousness that compelled her to leave the organ; and Mrs Fenton, with fingers quite out of practice, and without a moment's preparation, had to rush into the breach and do the best she could. How the psalmody fared that morning it were better not to inquire; it is sufficient that it was never alluded to. Mrs Mornay declined going to the parsonage, did not appear at the afternoon service, and all might have passed off as indisposition, had not some good-natured people happened to have inconveniently sharp eyes and ears, and they carried a tale to Mrs Cummings that she felt it incumbent upon her to notice.

She sent for Eleanor into her dressing-room, receiving her in her chair of judgment, with that look of imposing dignity well known to conscience-stricken cooks, and calculated to bring the most refractory culprit to her knees. Mrs Mornay looked grave and surprised, but not so frightened as she was expected to be, and she stood perfectly quiet till Mrs Cummings thought proper to speak.

'Is it true, Mrs Mornay,' said that lady at last, after she had looked at her long and seriously from head to foot, 'is it true that I am deceived in you?'

'I hope not, ma'am.'

'Is it true that you were not well in the morning service of Sunday?'

'I—I was taken rather faint, ma'am.'

'And, therefore, you did not attend in the afternoon?'

Mrs Mornay was silent.

'Answer me, if you please, without equivocation.'

'I did not attend, certainly. I am not aware that I gave any reason.'

'Are you not ashamed, Mrs Mornay, to answer so disingenuously? Why do not you own at once to your best friend *why* you staid away, and not leave her to find it out from others?'

'Madam!' said Eleanor.

'Nay, no explosion of temper, Mrs Mornay! *That* I cannot submit to for a moment. Did you, or did you not, walk with a strange gentleman, for half an hour at least, during the afternoon service, in the churchyard lane?'

'I did, ma'am; I have no intention of denying it. I do not see why it should displease you so much.'

'Not displease me? Is it pleasant for me to hear that you and he walked up and down talking, evidently on some very serious matter; that he was urging you to do something, and almost threatening you when you refused? Ah! you feel it, do you?' for Eleanor's change of countenance plainly expressed her vexation; 'you own you were imprudent and wrong. Come, confess the whole truth, and make me your friend. Is he your husband?'

'God forbid!' said poor Eleanor.

'Is he related to you?'

'No, indeed.'

'Has he a hold upon you in any way?'

'I cannot say he has not, but through no fault of mine. I have had heavy misfortunes in my life, and this is one of them.'

'But, Mrs Mornay, you must see that this is a serious state of things. You cannot expect me to take it all on your word. People are talking about it, in a very unpleasant way; and I shall be blamed for keeping you in my house.'

'Then I had better leave you, ma'am. I should be sorry you were annoyed on my account.'

'My good young woman—for such I will hope you are—why will you throw your friends away in this foolish manner? I do not wish to dismiss you and ruin your character, but I must insist that while you remain you are more guarded in your conduct. There is the garden open to you, when the young ladies do not use it; but to have you roaming about the lanes for everybody to talk about, is what I cannot allow while you are under my care. Do you hear?'

'Yes, madam.'

'And you have nothing to say to me?'

'Only that I am exceedingly sorry you have been an-

noyed. The gentleman I spoke to has left the neighbourhood, so I hope it will not occur again.'

'Your behaviour, Mrs Mornay, amounts to effrontery, and I will add, to extreme ingratitude, after all I have done for you, and the unusual indulgences you have received. I can tell you, it is not every lady who would employ, in the meanest capacity, a person who owns she can give no references.'

'I am quite aware of that ma'am. I believe I explained to you that it was one reason for my taking such a situation as yours.'

'I do not know anything about that, I am sure; but I know this, that unless you are more prudent, I shall feel it a duty to let any one who employs you in future know you are not to be trusted.'

'That will be rather hard upon me, ma'am, considering it was not my fault.'

'It is your fault if you persist in giving me no explanation; and what your friend, Mrs Fenton, will say, I am sure I cannot imagine.'

'I am ready to explain all that I can; you are welcome to know, and so is Mrs Fenton, that this gentleman came to speak to me on business, relating not to myself only, but to other people. I had no choice but to hear him at his own hour. More than this I am not at liberty to say. The parties who took the trouble to listen to our conversation could have heard but a small part of it, and I am surprised they should have had the bad taste to make it a subject of discussion.'

'Well, well, Mrs Mornay, we will say no more about it, only be more careful in future,' said Mrs Cummings, rather disconcerted by this last observation, and the manner in which it was spoken. She came to the resolution, on thinking the matter over, of not noticing it further; the rebuke must be allowed time to work, and she would not deprive a poor woman of her maintenance, at any rate till her daughter's clothes were finished. 'She certainly saves me a great deal of money, and one cannot have everything,' thought Mrs Cummings; in which she was, no doubt, perfectly right.

In pursuance of her resolve, she said no more in direct words; only kept Mrs Mornay on the shady side of her countenance, and allowed everybody to see that she did so. Mrs Mornay made no attempt to regain the sunshine; the consciousness of having been the subject of discussion seemed to make her shrink closer into her obscurity than before; and though

she persevered while she could in her duties at the organ, she gave up her cheerful Sundays at the parsonage, and so carefully avoided Mrs Fenton, that that lady had no opportunity of questioning her as she wished. A long succession of wet days prevented her from her daily exercise; and the return, in an aggravated shape, of her old cough, made her a prisoner to the house of the greater part of February. Her work, however, went on the same, and as she did not complain, nobody thought it necessary to be uneasy about her health. No one knew how often the deadly fear stole over her heart—if her health *did* fail—into whose hands should she fall ?

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### HOSPITALITIES.

MARCH came in due course, and the day fixed for the marriage of Miss Cummings was at hand. It had been a long promise that Mrs Sydney should attend the ceremony, if Arthur were well enough to be left; and not without considerable hesitation, Miss Clavering had yielded to a pressing entreaty for the favour of her presence as one of the bridesmaids. She had consented, sooner than disoblige her old friend, and vex the Captain, who set his heart on her going, as he could not go himself, that she might bring him back all the fun. He would not hear of either of them staying at home for him; he and Nurse Moyle were on the most devoted terms, and had half a dozen schemes for altering and improving the arrangements of the rooms, which only waited for an opportunity like this, when the ladies would be out of the way. He should teach Thomas to dance, and Bruno to smoke; and, in short, would be so busy, he should hardly have a moment to snatch his meals.

As for Uncle Rupert, it was pleasant to see the commotion he was in about Anne's equipment for the festal occasion. In an ordinary way, he troubled himself very little about such mysteries; though he appreciated a good general effect, the minute details were, he owned, beyond his comprehension; but in this matter of his niece's bridal gear, he displayed untiring

interest ; entering keenly into every debate touching colour, material, and make, and taking a world of trouble that all might be ready in time. To please him she put on her full costume before it was packed up for the journey, and came down to him and Arthur to be admired ; and if the homage of the eyes was sufficient, she received it in full. She was looking remarkably well ; her strength and nerve had gradually regained their tone since her visit to the sea, and her anxious guardians were no longer harrassed with fears for her spirits. Her eye had the steady brightness, her step had the spring and energy of health, and her beauty was of the style that is more striking in womanhood than in early youth. Uncle Rupert looked and looked again, long, fondly, wistfully ; and the little he said was just what she liked him to say ; she did not know of what he was thinking, nor of the letter at that moment in his pocket, from one who would have died sooner than cause her a pang—asking if there were a shadow of hope that the love of his life might be rewarded. That problem was never long out of Mr Clavering's mind ; the conclusion he came to on one day being dispelled on the next.

‘Well, uncle, what are you thinking of ? Are you satisfied with your work ?’ she asked, as she stood smiling before him, pretending not to be perfectly aware that he could hardly see her for the fog on his glasses.

He took them off and began polishing them slowly. ‘Yes, my dear, I am ; so well satisfied indeed that I have only one thing left to desire.’

‘And that is——’

‘That I may live to see you, on a similar occasion, the principal and not the second.’

‘Oh, are you there ?’ said she, laughing lightly, as she kissed his forehead, ‘then all I can say is, dear, you may live till that day comes.’ And she went out of the room singing.

To judge by the amount of talking it caused beforehand, and the general excitement of the household when the day of departure came, one would have supposed the two ladies were going to Australia at least. Poor Mrs Sydney, when she stepped into the carriage that was to convey them to the train, would have given the world to turn round, and escape back to her own room. She had been anxious that Anne should accompany her for several reasons ; first, because she was always happier in her presence—secondly, because Arthur wished it—and, thirdly, because if she refused, dear Millicent would be

disappointed and hurt. But when all the difficulties were removed and they were fairly on their way, her heart began to fail her. Dear Millicent, excellent manager as she was, had her own peculiar ideas of comfort, and they might not exactly coincide with dear Anne's ; and if dear Anne was not comfortable, what should she say to Mr Clavering and Arthur ? Millicent did not know how clever and observing she was, and might imagine she would not notice little things that would strike her directly—things that even as she pondered over the matter, rose vividly to her alarmed imagination, making her almost wish her favourite companion safely back at Lawleigh. She tried to break the truth to her by gentle hints—dear Millicent had so many trials, her daughters' education and introduction into society had drawn so largely on her resources, that with the loss she had sustained, she really did not know how she managed as comfortably as she did. She was sure they should be hospitably welcomed—dear Millicent's heart was always in the right place—but if there was not that display which Anne had a right to expect, she would excuse it, and assign it to the right cause. Millicent was so sensible—she always set her face against ostentation, and would do anything rather than enter into expenses she could not afford. Her friends knew this, and a hearty welcome and plain fare was all she ever professed to give.

Anne pleasantly endeavoured to reassure her. She did not think it necessary to mention the week's *menu* that Arthur had written out for her, and which was in her pocket at that moment, full of receipts for making dishes out of nothing particular, that would have astonished Dr Kane. She professed a strong partiality for plain living and conscientious economy, and that having studied the science a little herself, she was glad to have an opportunity of comparing notes with so great a proficient as Mrs Cummings. In sober earnest she had made up her mind to bear heroically all trials of this nature, for fear Mrs Sydney should be unhappy about her ; and felt not a little amiable and accommodating in consequence. Indeed, so much was said about dear Millicent's reduced circumstances, that she began to reproach herself, with having taken Arthur's nonsense too literally, and being satirical at the expense of a poor woman, who would, perhaps, be more liberal if she could. She was even considering what kind of present might most delicately be made from the Lawleigh stores, to compensate for the cost of their reception, when they arrived at the door of the Grove ;



and their hostess came into the hall to greet them, so stately in rustling silk, that they both felt ashamed of all they had said and thought. Servants appeared to offer attendance—fires were blazing in all the rooms—the house was full of guests, and its holiday aspect betrayed no particular economy anywhere. Anne secretly moralized on the expansive quality of scandal, and Mrs Sydney hardly ventured to meet her eye.

The fact was that they did not half appreciate the genius of Mrs Cummings, nor realize the great truth, that it was quite compatible with reason to be in reduced circumstances eleven months in the year, and to enjoy a genteel competency during the twelfth. There was as much good management displayed in the one as in the other. Her eldest daughter had, she considered, done pretty well, for if Mr Prynne had not much at present, he was to inherit something in time ; but Sophia's betrothed, though nominally independent, was very much at the mercy of a refractory uncle ; and this uncle, as Mrs Cummings had been secretly informed, held the disagreeable theory, that his provision for his nephew ought to be in proportion to the consequence of the family into which he was to enter. That she could really deceive a shrewd man of business about their fortunes, Mrs Cummings was too sensible to imagine for a moment ; but she was aware of the good effect of a judiciously prosperous exterior on some minds, and her reserves were brought forward, with the prompt decision of a good general, to decide the contest during the present visit.

To the new-comers, unaware of the fine policy beneath, it only seemed natural that such an occasion should lead to a little extra hospitality ; and the gratifying cordiality of their reception, and the warm gratitude expressed to Miss Clavering for the favour of her services, were of a nature to put them in good humour with themselves and the company. As soon as they had been made acquainted with the bridegroom elect and his sisters, fellow-bridesmaids of Miss Clavering's, Mrs Cummings presented to them her excellent friend Mr Blatherwick, senior, the uncle above-mentioned, who was covering the best part of the fire with his person, and watching the whole proceedings with the keen eye of conscious superiority. He greeted the ladies with tolerable politeness, eyed Mrs Sydney with a look of calculation, and Anne with undisguised pleasure ; and soon after, catching Sophia by the sleeve, whispered the query, ' Are you a favourite of the great aunt's—hey ? '

' Not that I know of—I never tried to be,' said Sophia.

'What? does her money die with her, then?'

'Her money died long ago. She lost almost all in Atterbury's bank.'

'Oho! Indeed! And the handsome girl with her—who is she?'

'That is her friend, Miss Clavering. *She* will be rich, I believe. Her uncle has no family, and he has a good fortune.'

'A logical piece of reasoning. Uncles have no choice in the matter, of course. What made your mother talk as if her aunt was a woman of property?'

'I am sure I don't know. It was only last week she was saying, no one knew how much she had done to help her in one way and another. Perhaps they have had some good news about her affairs—the bank may have paid something. I am sure I hope it has, for we lost a good deal too.'

'Very little, my love,' said her mother, patting her on the shoulder with an indulgent smile. She had glided up to them unobserved, and thought they had said quite enough on the subject. 'We do not expect these young heads to understand business matters, Mr Blatherwick; they have something else to occupy them just now—it will all come in time. The truth is, I was fortunate enough to have only a trifling sum at Atterbury's, and part of that has been recovered.'

'You have been very fortunate, ma'am—I wish everybody had come off as well. But then it is not every lady who is so good a woman of business.'

'I am sure, mamma,' Sophy eagerly began, 'you always said——'

'I always said you were a dear little giddy-pate, and you would like to stand chattering to Mr Blatherwick, I know—nothing better; but there is a great deal to be done, and time is getting on. I know those cards will never be ready.'

'I am going to do them now, mamma.' Rather sulkily, Sophy moved away, and her lover followed her to the table, where the wedding-cards were being put up into envelopes for the next day's post. 'One never knows what mamma is about,' she muttered to him, by way of relief to her feelings, 'and of all things, I do hate being treated as if I had no memory, and no sense.'

'It *is* a bore,' said young Blatherwick, 'but one gets used to it, you know.'

'Used to it? Why, has it been tried upon you?'

'I don't know about trying, but one always gets snubbed

when one says anything, and sometimes when one says nothing, you know. He has been snubbing me, off and on, ever since he came.'

'I am afraid he is not pleased, then?'

'It looks like it. I say, what an uncommonly pretty girl Miss Clavering is! There's Tommy Compton making himself charming to her, of course. He always gets hold of the prettiest girl in the room.'

As this was not a speech calculated to soothe her ruffled feelings, Sophia suffered it to pass without reply, though she could not help glancing, with a twinge of jealousy, to where Anne Clavering sat, conversing with Mr Compton, whose delight at the meeting was not to be mistaken. He had been introduced to Mrs Cummings at Christmas, at the house of a mutual friend, and had been beguiled into favouring the Grove with his presence, by the delusive hope of meeting Arthur Sydney. Discovering when too late that there was no chance of his coming, he had been giving himself all the airs of a spoilt favourite—declining to be amused or amusing, and allowing all the ladies, from Mrs Cummings downwards, to expend their pleasant words upon him with very little return, till the arrival of Miss Clavering restored his equanimity. He admired her beauty, and liked her to talk to him; and although she treated him rather too much as a boy—feeling the few years between them as if there had been twenty—they had been on sufficiently friendly terms to be mutually glad to meet in a strange land. He sat down by her side, poured out all his grievance, and told her all about his last run, and a great deal about himself besides; young gentlemen who are generally petted in society, being liable to fall into the mistake that everything concerning them must be interesting.

'Sydney will never ride again, I suppose, Miss Clavering. His nerve must be quite gone.'

'He is all nerve,' said Anne, shaking her head, 'or he could not suffer as he does, or bear it so bravely.'

'Poor fellow! I wish he could ride. There's nothing like it. If I am a little hipped myself, a gallop always cures me. It does, indeed. And I know of the nicest little mare—just up to his weight, and as easy as a cradle. Would go in harness too—you might drive her yourself—anybody might.'

'Anybody might, certainly, if I could, considering I never drove anything in my life.'

'You don't say so? Well now, Miss Clavering, I should

have thought you would have been up to all that sort of thing.'

'Should you? I believe I am up to many sorts of things that would puzzle you a little, but it would have taken a cleverer person than myself to drive old Bruno—and unless I had harnessed him, Esquimaux fashion, I do not know what else I had to fall back upon.'

'Ah, poor old Bruno! Is he still on his legs?'

'Probably on his hind-legs at this moment, for the Captain has no respect for his years and dignity, and puts him through what he calls position-drill, as if he were no better than a French poodle.'

'Just like Arthur. I wish he could see my terrier—I brought him here on purpose: he cost me a lot of money, and my jackanapes of a boy thinks a great deal more of him than he does of me. He's a sharp fellow, too—I wouldn't change either of them for a trifle. And such a dog that is for rats—Blatherwick and I walked four miles this morning to a fool of a miller's, where we were told we should get scores of them, and the idiot had poisoned them all—with his own bad flour, as I told him, and nearly had a pitchfork run into me for my pains. I'll be bound it was true. Blatherwick almost cried, he was so disappointed. Do you know Sam Blatherwick? He's a good sort of a fellow—rather heavy in hand—wants shoving along occasionally—but means no harm, and I don't know that he does any.'

This was not enthusiastic praise; nor when Sophia's betrothed came, in his turn, to pay his respects to Miss Clavering, could she find very much to add thereto. But his heavy good-nature rose in her estimation when he came into comparison with his future brother-in-law, Mr Prynne, who took everybody up directly they spoke, and if they did not speak, talked *at* them; noticed nothing that he did not find fault with, and saw through every move only to baffle it by one of his own. He had been excessively affronted by the deference paid to Mr Blatherwick, senior, and delighted in nothing so much as in drawing him into discussions, whereby he enjoyed two pleasures—that of making him angry, and that of making Mrs Cummings uncomfortable. Even under circumstances that might have been supposed favourable to temper, when a grand display was made of all the wedding gifts, to which the last comers had just added their contribution, he contrived to make so many invidious remarks about the difference between

French and English taste in such matters, that poor Mrs Sydney was nearly frightened into withdrawing her unpretending offering with an apology. Luckily, Mrs Cummings was at hand to prevent such an untoward result; and Anne Clavering, whose own gift had been chosen, rather in proportion to her love for her old friend, than her personal regard for the bride, was favoured with a ray of approval when it transpired that her portfolio and envelope-case came from Paris.

'The fact is,' said Mr Prynne, turning to Mr Blatherwick, senior, 'it is pretty generally acknowledged now, that the French are the first people in the world; they are ahead of you in everything; you can't touch them: they are better manufacturers, better soldiers, better engineers, better diplomats—better in everything than you are, and all the world knows it now, and you know it too.'

'I know nothing of the sort,' said Mr Blatherwick, much aggrieved. 'Speak for yourself.'

'Well, sir—I suppose you will admit that your military prestige is gone; all the world knows now, that you are not a fighting nation; you can get excited about it and talk big in the papers, but when it comes to details, you break down. You can't land a couple of thousand men anywhere without losing a third of them—you can't feed them—you don't know how to carry them when they are wounded—you get up fine flourishing reports of some great thing that you are doing, have done, or mean to do, and when it is looked into, what is it? I ask you that.'

'Don't talk about asking *me*, sir, or you may hear what you won't like. It is all that vile habit of cramming the newspapers with every foolish story that can be trumped up, which has put this into people's heads. The French know better—they won't allow that sort of thing, and they are quite right; but with regard to their being ahead of us, as you are good enough to observe, there may be two opinions on that matter. I fancy I could name the winner in a fair stand up fight between us.'

'My dear, sir, you barely exist on the sufferance and good temper of the Emperor. The French nation detest you, they have thousand of men where you have hundreds—and if he lifted his finger, you would have them all upon you before you knew where you were. And when once they were in possession of your ports, and your dockyards, and your arsenals, what would you do?'

'Kick 'em out again,' suggested young Blatherwick.

'No, no,' said Compton, 'we'd keep them there to work. Not a man of them would ever get home again.'

'Perfectly absurd,' said Mr Prynne. 'There is no real military spirit in the country. You won't get men in these days to turn train-band captains, like Johnny Gilpin; you can't be getting up the last chapter of the 'Antiquary' over again; people are too practical, too keen after the main chance, fighting is an expensive amusement; and if the French spend money enough with you, you'll be glad enough of their company.'

'Shall I?' said Mr Blatherwick, ironically. 'Well, sir, as you seem to know all about it, I suppose I shall. It is a new way of showing oneself practical, but we live and learn, Mrs Cummings, don't we? Hamburg got so uncommonly rich with Davoust to manage her affairs, it would, to be sure, be neglecting the main chance, of which Mr Prynne is pleased to speak so slightly, if we lost the opportunity of having a French prefect in the Mansion House, and a French marshal or two at the Horse Guards. I should doubt the Funds going up very fast under such circumstances, but I may be wrong; and as the richer we are, the less we can afford, perhaps it does not much matter. As to being glad of the company of the French, for the sake of their five-franc pieces, that is another question. They are precious glad to get our sovereigns, I know, and so long as there are fools enough in England to throw them away among them, they had better be satisfied with robbing us behind their own counters—they will find us ugly customers at home. Hey, Mr Compton?'

'Alarming plain,' said Compton. 'Charge home with the cheating yard-wand, and all that sort of thing. If cheats make good champions, I know a tailor and bootmaker that will be worth any money.'

Mr Prynne tried to be heard, but the clamour grew so vehement, everybody talking at once, that it was difficult to make out whither the argument was tending. All that could be ascertained appeared to be, that your commerce must be your first consideration, before all nonsensical ideas of national honour, or whatever you please to call it—that your Martello towers were useless, and your guns wouldn't carry far enough—that England would rise to a man if invaded, and therefore no preparation was necessary—and that France and Russia combined would crush her in a moment, and therefore all preparation was only money thrown away.

'We want our dear Crimean to settle the dispute,' observed Mrs Cummings several times, before she could get anybody to listen. 'But, dear me, Miss Clavering,' she exclaimed, skillfully availing herself of a lull, 'how very beautiful the workmanship of this envelope case is! I really do not wonder that people grow enthusiastic about French taste. We mean to beguile Mr Blatherwick to Paris some day—don't we, Sophy?—and see if his sturdy British spirit can be brought to admit his rivals can do something well.'

'Ma'am, they can do many things well. I like their cookery, and I wish our English ladies would take a lesson from them in management, instead of ringing the changes on ill-done joints, one after another, and made dishes that are only fit for the cook that sends them up. I admit all that; but I don't and won't put up with being told that they are better than we are, though if Mr Prynn modestly feels his inferiority, he is quite right to mention it. It is only to be hoped Miss Cummings will never find it out.'

He had now said something that he flattered himself was severe, and walked away, feeling very much the better for it. Mrs Cummings, who had winced at the allusion to the cookery, only too well justified by the preceding day's failure of the *artiste* she had hired for the occasion, let him depart with a smile at the company, expressive of her appreciation of his pleasant humour; and returned to Anne Clavering's wedding present.

'I hope, Miss Cummings,' said Compton, to the bride elect, 'you have had no anonymous gifts coming in unexpectedly. I saw that happen once, and it was very nearly being an awkward thing.'

Public curiosity was excited; he was pressed to tell the story.

'It is not much to tell; I was at a party once, the day before the wedding of a friend of mine—not that he is my friend exactly, for I wouldn't cross the room to speak to him if he came into it this minute—I won't mention names; he was a tremendous swell in those days; I have got a dog of his now, worth his weight in gold——'

'The slayer of rats?' interrupted Miss Clavering.

'Exactly so—I bought his dog, and hired his little scamp of a groom at the same time; and I don't know which I like best, or which gives me most trouble, for they are always getting me into some row or other. Well, I was at this party, as

I was telling you, and there was my friend whom I wouldn't speak to—and such a lot of presents about, the room was like a shop, for the bride, poor thing was one of the nicest girls in the world, and a general favourite, and it was who would give her the prettiest things. Well, presently, in walks the butler with a parcel, left for her by nobody knows who—and in it a gold bracelet—and no clue to tell who it came from.'

'From your nameless friend, of course,' said young Blatherwick. 'Just the thing Prynne is going to do presently. He has been fumbling in that pocket of his the last half hour.'

'I beg your pardon, Blatherwick. I am not the cherished heir of a British fundholder, and if I put my hand in my pocket, it is simply because nature abhors a vacuum.'

'You have not missed Mr Compton to finish his story,' said Mrs Cummings. 'He does tell one better than anybody I ever heard. Do, pray, go on. What followed?'

'Well, my nameless friend certainly had no hand in the matter, for he did not like it at all; and between ourselves I have good reason to believe it nearly broke off the match.'

'Indeed?' said Anne Clavering. There was not much in the word, but a good deal in the tone, for he turned to look at her in some surprise.

'Yes, it was a very near thing, and only ended well through the sweet temper of Miss —— I beg pardon; I will mention no names. Poor thing! that sweet temper cost her dear. She had better have shown herself a shrew and lost him.'

'You say that of your friend, do you?'

'My friend, as friends go, Miss Clavering. I told you when I began, that I had no opinion of him.'

'And no one ever knew or guessed the sender?'

'I fancy not. It was a curiously shaped thing—I looked at it particularly—with a heavy clasp. I thought it must contain some picture, or trinket; but I could not find any spring.'

'It was a very hard one,' said Anne; adding in a moment, while the blood flew to her temples, 'if there really was anything that your inquisitive fingers could not find out.'

'Thank you, Miss Clavering. It would be rather mortifying if it turned out to be only a puzzle. Perhaps that was the secret, after all; it was sent as a mystification; but it was not fair on the young lady. Anonymous proceedings are hateful things, and this was a cruel one.'

'You couldn't get on without anonymous proceedings, pronounced Mr Prynne.'



'I could, and I do, on the contrary.'

'The public mind requires them. Society could not exist a day, if every communication, every newspaper article, were signed with a name. Your editors would be in perpetual hot water.'

'Who cares for that? They keep other people in it often enough.'

'It would check the freedom of the public press.'

'Not a bit of it. I would have everybody say what he chooses, but stick by what he says, and not be afraid to let it stick by him.'

Mr Prynne demurred; others struck in, and the fray recommenced more furiously than before, but without a word of it being heard by Anne Clavering. She was roused at last by finding Mrs Sydney on the move, accompanied her to her room, and comforted her with assurances of brilliant health and spirits; her cheeks and eyes glowing at the moment, with a fire that the old lady observed with secret pride, and which amply justified her assertions. They exchanged a few good-humoured remarks on their own mistaken ideas, and then Anne left her in the hands of their maid, and was on her way to her own apartment, when her attention was caught by Milly's voice on the landing above. It was not exactly angry, nor exactly plaintive; but there was a blending of both, expressive of injury keenly felt, and as it was too loud for secrecy, Anne stopped to listen.

'It is a great deal too bad! I was promised that my dress should be all ready, properly trimmed like the others—Derrick said it should—and now they want all that work done, mine will never be ready, and I shall look as I always do, not fit to be seen! That is the way I am constantly served—pushed off to the last, and then everything scrambled up anyhow!'

'You shall not be disappointed, I promise you,' returned another voice, not quite so audible; 'this will not take very long, only it must be ready this evening. You shall have yours in time for to-morrow, so do not spoil your sister's happiness the last day you will be together.'

'I don't think she is particularly happy. She has been very cross all the morning, and I think Mr Prynne is——'

The sentence was evidently interrupted, and Anne, who had stood still from astonishment, hurried up the stairs before it could be attempted again.

'I am sure I heard one voice I know, and I think I heard

two. Milly, my child ! you here alone ? Who was with you just now ?

Milly was too shy to answer directly ; she was wondering how much Miss Clavering could have heard, and wishing she had known she was so near. But a door was half open behind her, and through it Anne caught sight of the face she was looking for.

‘I knew I could not be mistaken ! Why, Mrs Mornay ! Who would have expected to meet you here ? Why did you never let us know where you were ?’

Her eagerly outstretched hand would take no denial, and the thin fingers she clasped in her own, involuntarily clung to them with a gladness they could not conceal.

‘This is a pleasure, indeed ! And how are you, Mrs Mornay ? But I will not ask, for I cannot say you are looking as I should wish. How long have you been here ?’ Milly had slipped away, and the friends were alone in the work-room.

‘I told you,’ said Eleanor, ‘when I sent your parcel, that I had undertaken some work for Mrs Cummings. I have been with her ever since.’

‘At work all the time ? How was this ? Could you get nothing better ? Could you hear of no pupils ?’

‘I had no other situation in prospect, and this promised me a home for some months, so I was glad to take it.’

‘But such a situation as this—why it is not that of a gentlewoman !’

‘Is it not ? Well, there is no great harm in that. It is quiet, and respectable, and out of everybody’s way. I am quite content.’

‘Then I am not at all. With accomplishments like yours (I almost feel inclined to talk like dear Mrs Elton, in ‘Emma’), it is a real sin to waste your ability on what any dunce can do.’

‘Come, come, I do not allow that any dunce could turn out such work as mine. I am rather proud of my skill, and I assure you there is plenty of scope for cleverness when you have so important an affair on your hands as a *trousseau*. You cannot make me ashamed of my *métier*.’

‘What is the meaning of that cough, may I ask ?’

‘Ah, that is another affair altogether. If I had not just completed my task, I am afraid I should have been obliged to leave ; for it is becoming troublesome to others. The climate here is severer than I am accustomed to, and I am liable to this sort of thing.’

'Then you have decided on leaving soon?'

'Oh, yes, that is all arranged.'

'May I ask where you mean to go?'

'To confess the truth, I have not yet decided that. It will depend on circumstances. Excuse me, but I must go on with my work, as it is to be worn this evening.'

She took up the dress, the trimming of which she was altering, and Anne, as she bent over it, watched her silently. Her eye glanced round the room, and noticed the scanty, common furniture, the small square of carpet, the dull walls, once painted cream-colour, when the apartment was the nursery, but so rubbed and defaced it was hard to say what the colour was now—the meagre fire, the curtains waving in the current of sharp air that whistled through the window-frames, the large table, with its neat array of working materials, but no trace of any other refinement, any personal resource against weariness and depression—not a book, not a flower, not an ornament on the chimney-piece, not a print on the walls! Opening into it, Anne could see, was a small bed-room, without a fireplace, equally neat, and devoid of all but absolute necessities. Nothing to complain of, but to her taste, when she thought of six months spent there, cheerless and prison-like in the extreme. Eleanor caught the expression of her glance, and shook her head with a smile.

'You do not see my apartments to advantage just now. The aspect is rather cold for winter, but I can imagine it very cool and pleasant in summer, as the sun is never on it. It used to be the nursery, and was chosen as the healthiest room in the house.'

'Very likely,' said Anne; 'but then no child was left up here sewing all alone with a bad cough. It is no use, Mrs Mornay; I do not think you have treated us at all in a friendly manner, in doing this without letting us know. We thought Mrs Cummings meant something very different, and so, I am sure, did you.'

'Mrs Cumming had nothing better to offer, and, indeed, it matters very little to me what I do. How did you leave Captain Sydney?'

She seemed resolved on not being pitied, so Miss Clavering took the hint, and they talked on pleasanter matters, as if they had been in the drawing-room; Eleanor's work going on diligently the while. It was not the kind of work she had undertaken to do, but it had gradually become a practice of Derrick's,

to transfer to Mrs Mornay every stitch that she could get off her own hands, and at the present crisis, there was millinery enough in demand to employ them both. Anne admired her friend's skill, and made some suggestions of her own, but said no more about the unfitness of the occupation, and after staying with her as long as she might, withdrew without any audible murmurs on the necessity of leaving her up-stairs. Her forbearance, however, only lasted till she reached Mrs Sydney's room. The old lady saw in a moment that something had happened, and when she heard what it was, looked as much hurt as it was in the power of her gentle nature to be.

'I really am disappointed, my dear ; quite disappointed. After our strong recommendation, and all her kind care of that dear child, she should have been better treated than this. Such a lady as she is, and so young and pretty—it is not right to let her go about as a needle-woman—it really is not—and I am surprised my niece should have thought of such a thing.'

'Are you ? I am not. Mrs Cummings is a clever woman, and an excellent manager.'

'So she is, my dear.'

'And this has been a good bargain, and she is turning a penny by it up to the last minute. Milly, come in, my dear, and shut the door. Why did you not tell us Mrs Mornay was with you ?'

'I did tell Cousin Arthur, but mamma burnt my letter. She said she would not have her family arrangements made the subject of discussion.'

'Oh !' said Miss Clavering, checking the retort that was just on the spring, 'that alters the case, of course. Mrs Mornay does not seem well, though, Milly.'

'No, that is why she is going. Mamma thought of keeping her at one time, but she is afraid of her being laid up here ; so she says it is kinder to send her away at once.'

'Much kinder. I hope she will derive immense benefit from the change. Does she never have better fires in her room ?'

'No ; mamma thinks it is unwholesome to be too hot. Besides, there is always a fuss about the coals.'

'Ah, I dare say she has been a great expense to Mrs Cummings.'

'Oh, dear no ! mamma told sister she had saved a great deal by having the work done at home, as Mrs Mornay's board was next to nothing.'

'Your mamma is an excellent manager indeed, and I hope the money will do her good. I am sure you are always attentive and kind to Mrs Mornay.'

'Oh yes. She mends all my things, and without half the bother Derrick makes.'

'But you do something for her in return, don't you?'

'Yes, I go and sit with her while mamma is at dinner, and she amuses me very much when she doesn't keep on coughing; I like to hear her stories of places she has seen, and people, and all that, and when I have more of anything nice than I want, I always take her some—and she keeps it for the school-girls.'

'And you are going to spoil all this generosity and attention by keeping her up half the night to retrim your dress for to-morrow?'

'Will it keep her up? She did not say so.'

'I know it must, by the look of the job she has already.'

'That is sister's fault, not mine. Sister would have the trimmings altered, and Derrick hadn't time, she said. It is all sister's doing.'

'Perhaps so, but it was you Mrs Mornay nursed so kindly, not sister.'

Milly turned on her heel, rather sullenly, muttering something about it being 'always the case.' She walked off, as if determined not to be persuaded, but changed her mind before she had gone half way down-stairs, and came hastily back.

'Miss Clavering, it doesn't matter—much—about my trimming, does it?'

'Well, Milly, if you put it to me on my conscience, I cannot say it does.'

'Will you tell her so?'

'No—she may not believe me. It will do her much more good if you tell her yourself. If I tell anybody anything about it, it will be Cousin Arthur.'

'Oh, will you?' Milly's eyes spoke volumes of rapturous gratitude, and the next minute she was flying up the stairs to the work-room, as if afraid her resolution would fail.

Anne and her old friend sat looking at each other.

'Mrs Sydney,' said the former, at last.

'My love?'

'Out with it like a courageous woman, if you wish to have the credit of the first suggestion. I know your thoughts as well as if I read them.'

'You generally do, my love; and sometimes before I know them myself.'

'And a very good thing too. You know you have, all of you, said over and over again—my indulgent granny, my best of uncles, my gallant Captain, and my prudent Edward—there is only one thing poor dear Anne wants to make her the perfection we try and persuade her she is already, and that is—a friend of her own standing.'

'I do not know that we ever said so, my love, but I dare say it is very true. An old woman *is* dull company for a clever young one, I know.'

'Such an observation is unworthy of you, Mrs Sydney, and what is more, it is quite beside the purpose. On your conscience, as a woman of honour, would not the whole household be the better for her coming among us?'

'In what capacity, my love?'

'As my companion—that settles it at once. We will give her a fair salary, and she will be an acquisition to us all—play to Arthur, read to you, walk, and garden, and practice with me, and talk to Uncle Rupert. I can fancy nothing more delightful.'

'And Mr Wilton?'

'Mr Wilton is not often there, so he may take his chance. I have no fear of their not agreeing, or of his giving trouble—my only doubt is nurse.'

'Nurse Moyle? Why she is such a good, attached creature.'

'So she is, and it is that very goodness and attachment that makes me doubt. You did not see the perils you passed when you made your way to my sick-room; and you escaped them by some witchery of your own; but it would be too great luck for that to happen the second time. No bridegroom was ever more jealous of his fair one's regard, than my dear old nurse is of mine. However, nothing venture, nothing have; we will try fair means first, and if they fail, I must bully her a little, as I used to do in the nursery. I shall write to Uncle Rupert this minute.'

The letter was soon written; a very sensible, convincing letter, she flattered herself; but when it came to the point, she thought she would not send it yet. It was a hasty step perhaps, and she should wait another day and see. Her uncle's indulgence made her the more fearful of suggesting anything that might entail expense or inconvenience upon him, for which he was not prepared.

‘He would do as he always does,’ she thought, while she was dressing; ‘he would let me have my own way, whether it inconvenienced him or not; and if I had proposed it last year, he would really have been pleased, but I felt afraid then of the experiment—I do not know why. I can trust myself now, I think: I must be hard-hearted and bad-tempered, indeed, if I am not kind to so gentle a creature as that. What else have I to live for now, but to be kind to others? Still, I will be supernaturally prudent, and judge carefully before I commit myself. It would be serious to make a mistake in such a matter.’

Her toilette was just completed, and her maid gone, when a light tap at her door, to her no small surprise, announced the very person who had been occupying her thoughts. Miss Cummings had sent Mrs Mornay to request Miss Clavering would be good enough to step into her room for a moment before she went down. There was a question of taste under discussion, which it was necessary she should decide.

‘And when are you going to have a little rest?’ asked Anne, with a smile as she prepared to obey the summons.

‘By-and-by—when my work is over,’ she replied, smiling in return. ‘Stay one moment, Miss Clavering; your lace is caught—let me arrange it for you.’

They stood for a moment together before the long glass, as she was doing this; and the contrast could not but strike them both. The fresh, rich dress, and few, but elegant, ornaments of Miss Clavering, the glow on her cheek, the clear, handsome outline of her features, calmly conscious of personal attractions, as of the becoming array, yet wearing both as a matter of course, not worth an instant’s consideration, threw into melancholy shade the worn, neglected figure by her side, whose eyes gazed on her with a wistful admiration, as if it refreshed them to look on anything that reminded her of her native sphere. Had Eleanor been disposed to envy her friend’s brighter fortunes, that strange tale she heard in Westminster, a tale she neither quite believed nor forgot, would have checked her, the rather that there was something in those dark eyes, even while they beamed on her so sweetly, that told of hidden sadness, such as only one could read who had suffered too. It was this free-masonry of suffering that had drawn them together unawares, even more than the generous kindness of the one, and the gratitude of the other; and at this moment, as their glances met, they understood it for the time.

'Yes,' said Anne, slowly, as if in answer to Eleanor's previous words, 'yes, we have rest to look forward to, or what should we do? But how difficult it is not to long to throw down the weight, before you have got up the hill?'

'We have One to carry it for us,' whispered Eleanor.

'We have—but how do we treat Him, if He does not carry it our way? How do we treat Him when He takes that out of our hands that must have broken us down, but which we would rather have broken under, and still held fast? We talk a good deal of resignation, but I believe endurance is the best that can be said of it: and we submit with our lips, when, if we looked within—Come,' she said, interrupting herself with an abrupt change of tone, 'we are keeping the bride waiting, and that, at such a time, is little short of treason.'

She put her hand in Eleanor's arm, as they went out of the room; but Eleanor quietly drew back, and made her go forward alone. She was following at a little distance, when, startled by a joyous bark, and rush of little pattering feet, she looked round in time to see a small, wiry terrier bounding round her, snuffing at her dress, and then jumping on it with wet, dirty paws. 'It is fortunate that it is mine, not Miss Clavering's,' she could not help saying; but how like you are to poor Gipsy—very like indeed, my little dog!' So like was he, indeed, she stooped to stroke and caress him, so much to their mutual satisfaction, she had almost forgotten where she was, till a voice behind her, 'Mrs Mornay, if you please, you are wanted,' recalled her to realities. She hastily obeyed the summons, but not before her face had been distinctly seen by one at the end of the gallery, who stared after her as if he could not believe his eyes.

Mr Compton was deep in *his* toilette—a no less elaborate and important affair than that of bride or bridesmaid—when his young groom made his appearance, with the dog under his arm, and his round eyes looking ready to start from his head. So startling was the expression of his face, that his master, a brush in either hand, turned, and stood looking at him in amazement.

'Why, Joe, you young imp, what is it now?'

'If you please, sir, I wished to speak to you.'

'Going to give me warning? Take care. I do not want to hit the dog.'

'No, sir: if you please, sir, you promised me five pounds one day.'



‘Oh, that is all, is it? I did, on one condition.’

‘I’ve won it, sir.’

‘You have?’

‘Yes, sir. I’ve seen my mistress.’

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### MRS ATTERBURY LOSES HER SITUATION.

THE party at dinner that day was only augmented by the presence of Mr and Mrs Fenton, on account, as Mrs Cummings explained to her guests in confidence, of dear Mr Blatherwick’s great dislike to large mixed parties. It was fortunate, on the whole, that his taste was thus considered, for, notwithstanding the professed cook, and the hired waiters, the dinner was not exactly a success. Care sat on the hostess’s brow considerate, however skilfully veiled with lace and flowers, as delays occurred in the courses, and what should have been hot came up cold, and what should have been pleasantly cool proved unsubstantially trepid; and Mr Blatherwick, after two or three unsatisfactory essays of the made-dishes, put his knife and fork down with a ‘Humph!’ that made poor Sophia quake, and mightily delighted Mr Prynne. This Gentleman, it must be confessed, showed small sympathy with the politics of the family. He had a way of assuming the master of the house, that put Mrs Cummings out more than anything; asking for things that were not to be had, just to remind people that they ought to be there, and make them discontented and resentful—criticising the wine, and suggesting changes of bins, and such-like impossibilities, as if he did not know perfectly well, that a stock had been ordered in for the occasion, and was not so large but that it might be easily reckoned—and what was worst of all, perpetually stirring up Mr Blatherwick into disputes, which always resulted in exasperation. When those unlucky delays, moreover occurred in the middle of the repast, and it seemed doubtful whether there would prove to be any sauce to the fish, or any second course whatever, instead of throwing himself, like Madam Scarron, gallantly into the breach, with a good story, or piquant anecdote, to pass away the time, he would

keep calling public attention to it, as a new fashion, and one which, he believed, was likely to become popular. It was very much recommended by the doctors, as more wholesome than the old style of dinner.

‘If you come to that, it would be more wholesome not to dine at all,’ said Mr Blatherwick, emphatically.

‘Well, sir, perhaps it would. You are not an advocate for large dinner-parties, I understand.’

‘I don’t care how large the party is, sir, so long as the table is large enough to accommodate them; and I don’t care what the dinner is, so long as it is good of its kind, well dressed, and properly served. That is my opinion, if any one wishes to hear it, and I doubt your finding a better. I’ll take a glass of wine with you, if you please.’

‘With pleasure, sir. What do you patronise? I do not recommend that sherry—there has been some mistake about that—and the champagne is not iced enough. We must have the other bottles a little cooler, do you hear?’ to the waiter, who bowed submissively, but knowing what he knew, threw an ambiguous glance at the lady of the house, which she wisely would not see. She knew when to be blind, and deaf too, as well as anybody in the world. If by a wish she could have made Mr Prynne dumb, it is to be feared he would have had very little chance of gladdening the company with his wisdom that evening or of saying anything at all before the next day’s service. But as this could not be, she sedulously endeavoured to turn the conversation, and the guests in general being tired of Mr Prynne’s remarks, abetted her with considerable success, by all talking at once, so as to give no individual a chance of being heard for some time. It was not till the dessert was on the table that Anne, who had been listening with interest to Mr Fenton’s account of a harvest festival in his parish, and wishing it could be introduced into theirs, found her ear caught by words that effectually prevented her attending to anything else. The company had fallen on the topic of Atterbury’s failure, his case having been brought forward in the papers of the day; and Mr Prynne having expressed his candid opinion in favour of hanging all such unprincipled rascals, had called up Mr Blatherwick unexpectedly in the bankrupt’s defence.

‘It is all very fine talking,’ he said, ‘and nothing is easier than to sit drinking your wine, and settling who is guilty, and who is not, but there is a great deal to be said that is not so

easy to say. It is an ugly business from first to last—there is no denying that—but I know a little more of those things, perhaps, than some of you remarkably clever young fellows. Mark my words : we have not got to the bottom of that story yet, and never shall, till young Atterbury has pluck enough to come forward and face the worst. The old man is dead, and his son has had to drink what he brewed, and half the world takes it for granted that the young one had a hand in the brewing. That is yet to be proved. The young man was not above a couple of years in the concern at all ; and it is my firm conviction that he was as much a victim as anybody else who has been ruined by the failure. What has he saved out of the wreck ? Not a shilling—hardly a hope—certainly not a friend. I don't say he deserved one ; if he had had moral courage and integrity enough to have given up at his father's death when he knew how matters were, he would have stood much higher : but there was some reason why he did not, which has never come out yet, though I think I could throw light upon it if I chose.'

'What do you say about his treatment of his wife, sir ?' asked Compton, who had been unusually silent and abstracted till that moment.

'Well, it was a blow for the young lady certainly, when she thought she had married one of the richest men in England ; but I would have stuck by him, had I been his wife, notwithstanding.'

'Do you mean to say she did *not* ?'

'Of course I do. She gave up her fortune, which was very noble in her so far, but she declared she would never see him again, and she never has. That I know for a fact. It was told me on the very best authority.'

'I don't believe a word of it,' said Compton, doggedly.

'Very possibly, but it is so ; and what is more, I understand her relations in India make her a handsome allowance as long as she is separated from him, to be stopped on their reconciliation. I am not positive as to the truth of that story, but such is the report.'

'For the credit of human nature,' said Mr Fenton, 'let us hope it is not true.'

'Well, really,' observed Mrs Cummings, 'I do not see why we should be hard upon the poor lady, if it is so. If her husband has ruined her, what can she do but accept the kindness of her relations on their own terms ? After de-

ceiving her in such a manner, he must expect her to take some care of her own interests. Don't you think so, Miss Clavering ?'

'It must depend on the character of a woman,' said Anne, calmly. 'If she married him for money, she may forsake him for it too.'

'Does any one know where she is at present ?' asked Mr Fenton.

'In Italy,' pronounced Mr Blatherwick, without hesitation.

'Italy ?' repeated Mr Prynne. 'No, indeed, sir, you are wrong. I heard of her myself—let me see, where was it ? Boulogne, I think.'

'Italy, sir, I assure you. She may have been to Boulogne first, but she is not there now.'

'I'll bet you any money she is.'

'I don't bet, sir, and I don't know what you mean by *any money*. Your ideas of money and mine do not agree.'

They certainly did not, judging by the hot discussion that followed on this remark, so vehement as to drown all other conversation ; the ladies, after bearing it as long as they could, retiring at last almost distracted with the shrill voice, in which Mr Prynne had demonstrated, entirely to his own satisfaction, that in ten years at the most, the commerce and credit of Great Britain would be destroyed, and pass into the hands of her neighbours, unless sundry stringent reforms, known, it appeared, only to himself, were adopted and rigorously carried out immediately.

'A very clever man, Mr Prynne—is he not, dear aunt ?' asked Mrs Cummings, wiping her brow in a state of exhaustion, as they crossed the hall to the drawing-room.

'I suppose he is,' said Mrs Sydney, meekly. The little he had said to her had been in disparagement of the British army in the Crimea, as compared with the Russians ; and this had been a heavy blow and great discouragement to the admiration she had intended to feel.

'Any one who did not know him, perhaps, would think him argumentative. I am afraid,' turning to Anne, 'our excellent friend, Mr Blatherwick, does ; but it is that honest frankness that, as I often say, constitutes his real charm.'

'Is it ?' said Miss Clavering.

'Oh yes, indeed. He would not flatter Neptune for his trident, or Jupiter for his thunder ; and to hear him talk, one

would suppose *I* never did anything to please him ; whereas, dear fellow, I can truly say no son of my own could be more —What is it, my dear ?’ for Milly had appeared, and was at her elbow, with a face full of ominous intelligence. A whisper passed and the hostess soon after glided out of the room ; Milly confiding to Anne when she was gone, that there was a grand quarrel among all the servants, and the cook meant to give warning directly.

‘I only wish it was Derrick—she is so rude to Mrs Mornay.’

‘I was just going to ask after Mrs Mornay,’ said Mrs Fenton, who was standing near. ‘I have not seen her for some time, Millicent. How is she ?’

‘She always says she is pretty well, but she coughs very much, so she is going,’ said Milly.

‘Going ? Has she heard of another situation ?’

‘No, I believe not.’

‘I wonder if I might run up and see her.’

‘She does not expect company ; the room is full of our dresses for to-morrow ;—she has been hard at work all day.’

‘Then a visit will do her good, said Anne ; ‘and if Mrs Fenton will venture, I will support her with pleasure.’

‘You know her, then, Miss Clavering ?’

‘Oh yes ; ask Milly if we are not old friends. I am only sorry to see her so employed.’

‘Ah !’ said the incumbent’s wife, drawing her a little aside, ‘that is just what I have felt, ever since I knew her myself. So accomplished as she is, why is she not in a superior situation ? Do you know her history ?’

‘No ; only that she has seen better days ; and really, if she has not, she must have been singularly unfortunate. Come, Milly, you will show us the way.’

Milly was ready, and as her sisters were engaged with their other guests, the opportunity was favourable. She ran up-stairs full speed, and opened the door of the work-room without the ceremony of knocking. ‘I’ve brought you two —’ There she stopped short, and stood staring. The ladies had by this time reached the door, and were scarcely less surprised to find standing within it, Mr Compton’s groom, carrying Mr Compton’s dog.

That the recontre was unwelcome on all sides, was evident from the colour of all their faces ; but Joe was the first to recover his ‘presence of countenance.’ In very few words, he

contrived to explain that he had only come to fetch his master's dog, which had run away from him to follow Mrs Mornay. He was exceedingly sorry—he hoped Mrs Mornay would excuse it.

‘For this once, I do,’ said Mrs Mornay, with marked emphasis; ‘but I shall not excuse its repetition. You will be good enough to keep your dog properly secured in future, for into this room he must not come.’

He bowed in respectful silence, and withdrew. Milly, after expressing her great amusement at the circumstance, ran down to tell the story, and beg for the dog in the drawing-room, leaving the ladies alone with Mrs Mornay. They saw she was agitated and nervous, and it had a contagious effect on Mrs Fenton, who, as Anne could not help noticing, had looked more annoyed at the whole thing than the occasion seemed to warrant.

‘That was a sharp-looking boy,’ observed Miss Clavering. ‘I suppose it is the same Mr Compton told me of, who was always getting him into scrapes. I hope neither he nor the dog were really troublesome to you?’

Oh no, Eleanor hastily replied; the servant had no right to come into her room, but otherwise he had done no harm, and the dog was quiet enough. And she changed the subject, by drawing their attention to the specimens of her work that were still unpacked, talking in a hurried, slightly excited manner that was unlike her own.

‘I think I may fairly ask for a recommendation, Mrs Fenton, may I not? You would not hesitate to give me one, would you?’

‘If I did, it would be because I would rather give it for something better. Miss Clavering and I were agreeing on that point as we came up-stairs.’

‘You knew what I thought long ago,’ added Anne.

‘I did; I know you both mean kindly; but you do not seem to understand that—Well, I may as well speak plainly. A character will do for a needlewoman—a governess must give references.’

‘Are you afraid we would not give you any?’ said Mrs Fenton, kindly.

‘You would do any kindness you could, but you are too highly principled to say what you do not know.’

‘Whose fault is it we know so little? Why will you not trust your friends?’

'I know the value of friends too well to risk the chance of losing them.'

'You will keep friends, not lose them, by truth and straightforwardness,' said the clergyman's wife, who, good-natured as she was, never beat about the bush for mild expressions when plain ones would do. She thought her friend wanted to be helped in the straight path, and this was her way of helping her. Anne, who listened in silence, saw how keenly Eleanor felt her words.

'This is just the difficulty,' she said, 'that I have to contend with everywhere. I must do the best I can, but if you will help me to some employment, however humble, it will do me great service. I must leave this house directly.'

'Directly? What, to-night?' asked Mrs Fenton, smiling.

'I wish it could be to-night! I wish I had left a month ago. I wish I had never come.'

'Do not talk so, unless you would have me believe you do not care for our friendship. You were brought here for some good end, we know; and I am not flattering you when I say you have been useful to everybody you have met. That should cheer you, at any rate.'

'It would not be the first time you had cheered me,' said Eleanor, trying to smile.

'Nor the last, I hope. Tell me, if I may ask the question, where do you mean to go when you leave?'

'I do not know. But I must find work somewhere—for a little while longer. I do not think it will be very long.'

There was a short silence, only broken by her cough. 'Well,' said Mrs Fenton, clearing her throat, which had grown very husky all of a sudden, 'you will let us see you before you go. You will not take flight so suddenly that Mr Fenton will not be able to wish you God speed, if he may do nothing else.'

She held out her hand, which Eleanor pressed affectionately.

'Think of me as kindly as you can,' she murmured, 'even if you hear strange things of me some day. What should I have done this winter without your kindness?'

Mrs Fenton shook her head, but seemed unable to make any reply. She was touched, sorry, sympathizing, and uneasy all at once. There was a mystery about her friend Mrs Mornay that all her good will could not prevent her disliking; for, to her honest notions, mystery always meant something

you were ashamed to tell. She could not stay any longer to press the subject; perhaps she was glad of the excuse to let it drop till she had consulted her husband; for do what she might, uncharitable and unkind as it made her feel, she could not help wishing over and over again that she had not found Mr Compton's servant with her. She never saw a boy look more guilty than he did at first, and his excuse was, after all, a lame one. What secret could these two have in common, if it were so? And how would it be possible to believe in any face again, if Mrs Mornay could deceive?

Anne had scarcely spoken while she was by, and left the room with her, only to return directly afterwards. She closed the door, took Eleanor by both hands, and they gazed into each other's eyes: Anne feeling her chivalry wax hotter, the more she looked at that fair, sad face, and Eleanor thinking again how very handsome Miss Clavering had grown, and what a sense of protection and comfort there was in having her in the house.

'So you have made up your mind to go, really?' was Anne's first remark, 'and you want another situation, where you will not be worried for references. May I propose one?'

'If you think I am fit for it. You see what I am.'

'I do; but it is for you to decide on the fitness. I want you as my companion.'

Eleanor smiled incredulously. 'What can you want with a companion with such a home circle as yours?'

'It is just on account of that circle that I require a lady of my own age to associate and walk with, besides all you could do for the rest of the party. I have talked it over with Mrs Sydney—she quite agrees with me, as she always does. I am afraid we cannot offer you the salary you deserve, but we shall not quarrel about that. Only tell me you will consent, and I will answer for the rest.'

Eleanor stood looking at her in silence, thinking a great deal in a few moments—thinking of the haven of rest it would be after the weary winter—of the brave young sufferer whom her music would soothe—the paternal kindness of Mr Clavering—the old lady's gentle sweetness—the refinement and courtesy of their way of life—and the temptation to yield at once was very strong. But her reply was steady.

'Before I give any answer, go and consult Mrs Cummings, and when you have heard all she has to tell you, let me know if your opinion has changed. If it has, I shall consider all



this as unsaid : and yet I thank you as if I accepted your offer at once—as I am more tempted to do than you can ever imagine or appreciate.’

‘There is a mystery in all this,’ thought Anne, as she descended to the drawing-room, ‘and perhaps I have been rash in acting on impulse. But no—I have faith in physiognomy, and her’s is an angel’s face, in all but that deep sadness, which it must be my business to cure. Talk to Mrs Cummings?—that I will, with pleasure, if only for the satisfaction of telling her a piece of my mind. I should sleep easier if I could do it to-night.’

But this was sooner resolved than done. The gentlemen, joined the ladies early, and the hostess was too much occupied from that time for any private conversation. Mr Blatherwick came and seated himself between Mrs Sydney and Anne, with the harrassed expression of a man who has gone through a trying affair, without a satisfactory result. His dinner had been a real trial, and he did not care who knew it.

‘We are in rather too early for you, ma’am, I’m afraid,’ he said to Mrs Sydney, as she made room for him on the sofa.

‘It is very polite of you, sir, to leave your wine for us so soon,’ said Mrs Sydney, who was the least in the world afraid of him, and therefore anxiously civil.

‘Don’t flatter yourself, ma’am, that it is paying you any compliment. You must be very bad company indeed not to be an improvement on such a vintage as *that*.’

‘I am no judge of wine, sir, I drink so little ; but I suppose the agreeable conversation you enjoy together over it, is half the pleasure.’

‘It certainly has been to-day, ma’am : the conversation came out of the same bin as the port, and I don’t seem to care how little I enjoy in future of either the one or the other.’

Mrs Cummings, who was hovering near, interposed at this juncture, and drew her docile aunt away to look again at the wedding gifts, thus leaving Anne and Mr Blatherwick to entertain each other. The conversation into which they gradually fell, must have been more attractive than that of the dinner-table, for the old gentleman grew more and more emphatic and eloquent, and the young lady’s handsome eyes gleamed brighter, and her colour deepened in its glow, as she hung on his words, encouraging him to proceed, till Mrs Cummings, watching them from afar, began to grow nervous about the result. Mr Blatherwick’s marrying, himself, was, of course,

entirely out of the question, but if he preferred Anne Clavering for his nephew, what was to become of Sophy? And here was her other cherished guest, Mr Compton, instead of being the life of the party as she expected, with so many young ladies ready to admire everything he said and did—sitting in a dismal attitude, a martyr to tooth-ache; he had had it all day, he said, and it was now worse than ever. Everybody pitied and condoled with him, and everybody suggested a different remedy; and he was encouraged to recline in an easy-chair, and find what comfort he could in a warm silk handkerchief; nobody taking offence at his short, snappish answers, or at his giving the preference to Milly's attentions over those of the rest of the company. Milly, having failed in her endeavour to introduce Gipsy into the drawing-room, had been eager to tell his master of his audacity, and he kept her in confidential chat till her mother sent her to bed. Soon after this event, he retired too, Mrs Cummings overwhelming him with motherly care, and bidding him take notice, that unless quite free from pain the next morning, she should not allow him to go to the cold, draughty church on any account whatever.

He laughed this announcement to scorn at the time, but when the morning came, it appeared she had reason on her side. He owned to an amount of suffering that wrung the hearts of all the ladies; and though he still protested he would go to the wedding, was overruled by general authority, and seemed glad of the excuse to return to the room he had quitted. Mrs Cummings was sadly disappointed, but heroic in forcing him to stay at home; and having done all she could for his comfort in way of a blazing fire, arm-chair and footstool, and all the newspapers, magazines, and novels in the house, was fain to leave him to his misery and the care of his servant; all her available hands being disposed of already. The breakfast was under the care of the hired retainers; but all who were not absorbed in the household duties, had leave to attend the ceremony, and the marriage train had not long left the house, before the upper floors were as silent and deserted as invalid could wish.

There had been little in the intercourse between Miss Cummings and Mrs Mornay to win for the bride the sympathy of her workwoman; and yet Eleanor's heart that morning was very full. It was impossible for her to assist at the adorning of the happy, excited girl, flushed with hope, triumph, and gratified vanity, without thinking of her own bridal, and yearning

to be assured she had no such heavy lot in store. She had not presumed to offer more than the silent sympathy of her eyes, but something in their expression touched the heart of the bride, little accustomed as she was to trouble herself about such people's feelings; she took leave of her with more graciousness than was her wont; and even invited her to go to the church and witness the ceremony. Eleanor had not courage for this, but her thoughts went there with her, and she found what solace she could in praying she might be happier than herself. She was musing over the fire in the unaccustomed luxury of idleness, her Bible open on her knee, and her husband's letter open on the Bible, but her eyes too dim to read the loved words in either—when the under house-maid, a smart little maiden, recently imported, opened the door, and looked curiously in. 'Only to look at the fire—I thought it must want mending, that's all,' was her excuse, and as she vanished without waiting for any reply, Eleanor thought no more about it, till soon after she heard a step at the door again. Her back was turned at the moment, and supposing it was the maid with the coals, she did not immediately look round. The door closed hastily, and the step approached her chair; she rose with a start, and saw Mr Compton standing before her in an attitude of urgent but respectful entreaty.

He was prepared for her look of indignant astonishment, but not for the change in her appearance; and though eager to disarm the anger that he knew she must feel, his agitation made him stammer and hesitate, so that his first words were almost unintelligible. She did not try to understand them, but interrupted him as soon as she could command her voice.

'You have no right, Mr Compton, to do this; the wish I expressed to your servant ought to have been enough. I bore the affront of his intrusion, believing it would not be repeated, but this is too much. If you had any consideration for me, any feeling for my misfortunes, such as I thought you would have had, you must know that to force yourself upon me here could only give me great pain, and expose me to annoyance and distress.'

Her distress was, indeed, so evident, the young man was quite overcome. 'Dear, dear Mrs Atterbury,' he said, eagerly, 'I never meant to be inconsiderate, or to give you pain for a moment: I would give all I have in the world to serve you—I would, indeed: but you would not see me by fair means, so I was obliged to contrive it in this way, for as to being

in the same house without seeing you for one moment, I could not do it—I should have let it all out down-stairs, and that, perhaps, would have been worse. And now, if I see you look so unhappy, I shall be quarrelling with some of them presently—I know I shall. I only wanted to ask you one thing—will you let me write to my mother, and she will come and fetch you herself, to stay with her as long as ever you please? She has so often wished she could find you—she would be so delighted that you trusted her—will you let me write? or shall I go and bring her here? I will be off this moment if you like.’

She shook her head with a mournful smile, though she held out her hand in acknowledgment.

‘The only service you can do me, Mr Compton, is to leave me, and keep my secret. That favour I will ask, as it is, unhappily, necessary to my peace. Grant me that, and go, and I will gladly believe you have only acted from a mistaken wish to do me service.’

‘Go without a word? And is that all? What have I done to forfeit your confidence?’

‘I do not understand you. What do you mean by such a question?’

‘Mean, Mrs Atterbury?’

‘Yes, sir. Answer me, instantly—when did I take you into my confidence? I have not seen you since the day of my marriage.’

‘No; and you promised you would, and I built so much upon it, I was sadly cut up that you changed your mind. I would have given anything just to be sure I was doing what you wished.’

‘When, sir? You do not seem to know what you are saying.’

‘It is not for me to remind you, if you have forgotten, Mrs Atterbury—’

‘I have forgotten nothing, sir. I wish sometimes I could. Speak plainly, if you would not drive me mad. You terrify me more than I can describe. To what are you alluding?’

‘Only to—to that time when Despard came to me—after he had seen you at the Treshams’, you know—’

‘I do know. Go on. He went to *you*—from *me*?’

‘He said so. What? Do you mean that he told me a lie?’

‘Hush! No unnecessary words—we have not time for

them. Tell me all he said, for this is very serious. And first, how you came to be mixed up with our affairs at all.'

'I'll tell you that in very few words. Your landlady, Miss Whatever-her-name is, came to Sir John Pierpoint while I was dining with him, to tell him you were ill, and when Sir John went to fetch you, I went too—to see if I could be of any use, not to be in your way. When we got there, you were gone. There were sharp words amongst us—I, for one, thought there had been foul play, Martock and Despard were evidently suspicious of each other, and it ended in the two old gentlemen starting after you one way, and Jack and I another. Jack found out you had been followed by a spy of old Martock's, and putting two and two together, he thought the place to hear of you was the old fellow's house. So there we went, and Despard, after some difficulty, with the help of my purse, got the truth out of the servant. You had been brought there almost insensible, and were lying down, till you were better, or till his master came home. He undertook to make the spy, a fellow always ready for a drink, too comfortable to give trouble, and then we undertook the rest. Despard hid himself in the garden, and I kept watch in the road. You see, we did not know how much was voluntary on your part, and how much planned on theirs, and we waited to see if there was any way of letting you know you had friends close at hand. Jack said old Martock would think nothing of frightening you into a brain fever, if it suited his purpose; and yet we durst not force ourselves in upon you, for fear of doing mischief. By-and-by came Sir John and Martock, and then I saw nothing more, till you rushed past me down the road. I was afraid of startling you if I caught you suddenly, so I followed at a little distance, till I saw you go into Mr Tresham's, and then I went back to look for Despard. I met him half way, and we agreed, as you were safe, we had better do nothing more. Well, on the Monday, Jack came to my rooms, and said he had been to see you on urgent business; he had discovered, no matter how, that some very dangerous papers were going to be brought to light about Atterbury's affairs, that would give you no end of trouble and distress, and that the only way of stopping them was by paying a smart sum down. That you would have paid it, only you had put all your ready money out of your own power, and—you had authorized his applying to me.'

'And you believed him?'

'Well, he put it in such a way, how could I help it? Any

friend of yours must have believed him. It was just as one friend might fall back on another in an extremity, you know—and he said, too, that you would see me yourself in a few days, and explain everything. I only felt proud you would let me serve you, and the long and the short of the matter is, the money was found. No, you need not assure me—I know it was all a lie, and I have to beg your pardon for not knowing it at once.’

There was indeed no need for assurances; he had seen the truth already in the agony with which she listened; and he trembled with rage as he thought how he had been imposed upon. To do him justice, he minded the pecuniary loss much less than the disappointment of not having been of the service he believed; and tears of resentment and indignation stood in his eyes at the sight of hers.

‘I’ll follow him—I’ll track him through the world, and make him beg your pardon—I will, if I have to horsewhip him through half the towns of Europe. That he should use your name at such a time! The double-dyed, swindling rascal! And if he did this once, he may have done it before. Depend upon it, he cheated Fred through thick and thin. I heard an old gentleman here declare at dinner yesterday, it was the belief of those who knew best, that the greatest victim in all this failure was poor Atterbury himself. He had been dragged to his ruin by his father and his friends.’

‘We will not speak of that now,’ she said, faintly. ‘I dare not justify any wrong in which he shared; we must take the shame if we would humbly hope for pardon; but I need no one to tell me he was as much sinned against as sinning. If I did not know that, what would become of me? Some day he will know of your generosity and kindness, and thank you better than I can. I can only entreat you to forgive and to believe me. All I know is, that Mr Despard asked me for money, and I had none to give him. Your name was never mentioned, and never occurred to me for a moment.’

‘I can quite believe that,’ said Compton, in rather a mortified tone. ‘It is only what I ought to have known beforehand. I beg your pardon for having forced this interview upon you, though I am glad I know the truth. There—that knock at the door is to tell me to go. How thoughtless I was to come’—for her look of distress filled him with concern; he felt now he ought not to have exposed her to this.

‘Forgive me a thousand times—you shall not be troubled again,’ was all he had time to whisper in adieu, as he pressed the hand she silently yielded, and hurried back to his own apartment and easy-chair.

Great was the satisfaction of Mrs Cummings, on returning home, to find her guest considerably relieved by her remedies, and hopeful of being able to do justice to the wedding breakfast. As if conscious of having been found wanting in the qualities of an agreeable inmate, he exerted himself now to make up for lost time, and devoted himself to Sophia Cummings with an ardour that completely threw her lover into the background. Young Blatherwick, never very brilliant at the best, grew first silent, then sulky, then resentful, at his eclipse; and at last took his revenge by carrying his devotion to Miss Clavering. In this spirited measure, he was visibly encouraged by his uncle, who did not hesitate roundly to pronounce her by far the handsomest and most sensible girl he had met with for a long time; an opinion which he saw no cause to alter when he discovered that she decidedly preferred his conversation to his nephew’s. To be sure, they generally talked on but one subject; but as it was one on which he held strong opinions, and took pleasure in expressing them freely, he did not object to that; and considering her old friend’s losses, it was natural she should be interested too. It was not every young lady who would, but so much the more to Miss Clavering’s credit. So he talked, and she listened and drew him on, till, between uncle and nephew, she was pretty well absorbed, and Mrs Cummings began to consider, whether, in the turn things seemed to be taking, Sophy would not be so much the gainer by the change as to make it a question to which she was most indebted, Miss Clavering, or Mr Prynne. The good spirits this new prospect gave her, together with the joyful anticipation of this last-named gentleman’s approaching departure, helped her through all the trials of the day; and how many they were was known only to herself. The happy pair started early for the Continent, and the neighbours, sympathizing generally with Mrs Cummings’s emotions on the subject, came willingly in the evening, to help her to rejoice; and music and dancing, with cards for the elders, gave a sufficiently successful finish to the festivities to look very well in the county paper the next week. Compton was the life and soul of the whole proceeding, keeping up the dancing with untiring zeal, and fairly stealing poor

Sophy's inconstant heart, beyond all power of young Blatherwick's resentment to recall. Just as as they were breaking up, she saw Compton talking earnestly to her mother; her spirits fluttered with excitement and hope, even though Mrs Cummings looked alarmingly grave. She seemed to be urging something to no purpose—what could it be? Her curiosity was not long tortured, for when he wished her good-night in turn, he announced that it was good-bye also; he meant to start for town early the next morning, and had ordered a carriage to take him in time for the first train, before anybody in the house would be awake. No gentle persuasion of word or look could avail; he only shook his head significantly, with a hint that he was better away, and, at any rate, go he must.

And go he did, leaving so very unsatisfactory a state of things behind him, that Anne began to wonder how far her civility need be stretched, and whether it would be wrong to suggest to Mrs Sydney, that home duties were paramount to all others, and the sooner they returned to Lawleigh the better. There had been a half promise of remaining a week, but that seemed now a moral and physical impossibility. The attentions of young Blatherwick, which had amused her at first, became an annoyance when she perceived the inferences that were being drawn; and his uncle, having exhausted the subject which had made his society valuable, was only less wearisome in being less assiduous. Sophia was plunged in silent gloom; the Miss Prynnes had very little to say to their sister bridesmaid, except about their dress and the wedding; and she had reason to suspect that they had found out enough of her ignorance on many points of fashion, to hold her much cheaper than Miss Clavering of Lawleigh was accustomed of late to be held.

'There is no denying the fact that my early training has been sadly against me,' she said, when she was sitting alone with her old friend in the drawing-room, the third day of their visit; 'all your hints and experience, and all Uncle Rupert's liberality, have not succeeded in undoing the work of five-and-twenty years. I have had to acquire late in life what these girls learned without knowing it, and like all adult scholars, find it very hard work! Why do young ladies make it a rule to avoid, whenever they can, the smallest admixture of a sensible idea in their conversation? They must have ideas, with all the education they have received—



a great many more than I can ever hope to have—and yet they keep them as scrupulously locked up as if they feared their value would diminish by circulation.'

'Very true, my dear,' said Mrs Sydney, who generally agreed to all Anne's remarks, whether she understood them or not.

'I do not mean to say there is not a good deal of sense in knowing how things are to be made, and still more in knowing how to make them; but the difference between the way these young ladies talk and think of dress, and the mind Mrs Mornay brings to bear upon the making—is as great as between her temper and mine. I wonder if she means to accept my offer; and what Uncle Rupert will think of my having made it?'

'Your uncle always approves of what you do,' said Mrs Sydney.

'Yes, and therefore I have to judge for him and myself too. I do not think my instincts have led me astray this time. I am sadly behindhand about fashions, and millinery, and new music, but I can read a truthful face—and hers could not deceive.'

'I hope not, my love. She always struck me as amiable and modest; but——'

'But you are thinking of that story Mrs Cummings told us. Why could she not believe her word and be satisfied? Why should not a man come and speak to her on business—and bully her, too, as a poor woman is sure to be bullied in such matters, when there is no one to take her part? I do not care who comes after her, provided she will let us act as her friends.'

'That is just what Mrs Fenton says she will not do.'

'You asked her, did you?'

'Yes, and we talked about her a long time. My dear, I am sure she is very much to be pitied, and I like her myself very much indeed, but we must take care what we are about, you know.'

'Just what Uncle Rupert said before he had walked home with her, and sat with her an hour afterwards. I mean to take the greatest care, and, to prove it, am going now to Mrs Cummings, to tell her my plans, and take her candid opinion on its expediency. I shall be very much mistaken if it is not such a relief to her mind, that she will give it her hearty approval.'

Mrs Cummings was in her dressing-room; and as it was

there she received all confidential visits, and had invited Anne in herself the previous day, in a not very successful effort to ascertain the exact state of her aunt's finances, Miss Clavering knocked without hesitation. 'Come in—what is it? I am particularly engaged,' was the greeting she received, in a tone of so much sharpness, Anne was going to apologise and retire, but Mrs Cummings begged her to remain. I have just been hearing what has displeased and annoyed me more than I can describe, and it is on a subject that interests you and my aunt, Miss Clavering; you have both been so kind to this ungrateful Mrs Mornay.'

'Is it of Mrs Mornay you are speaking? Then pray let me hear everything. In what has she shown ingratitude—and to whom?'

'To whom, Miss Clavering? To whom does she owe so much as to me, so kind as I have been to her all the winter, taking her into my house without a reference, just because she seemed friendless, and I thought, deserving? And now what do you think Derrick has been telling me?'

'That Mrs Mornay has been doing her work, I am afraid,' said Anne, with an ironical glance at the maid, which increased the latter's already excited temper, almost beyond bounds.

'Ma'am,' she said, reddening up to the eyebrows, 'I am quite aware that Mrs Mornay poisoned the ladies' ears about me, when Miss Millicent was ill, and it was only to accommodate you, ma'am, you please to remember, that I consented to live in the same house with her at all. I beg to say, begging Miss Clavering's pardon, I never allow any one to do my work, or to take away my character.'

Anne only smiled, and turned to Mrs Cummings. 'If any accusation has been brought against Mrs Mornay from this quarter, I would suggest that she should be heard in her own defence.'

'You are quite right. Go up-stairs, Derrick, and desire Mrs Mornay to come to me directly.'

Anne shrugged her shoulders at the message, and the alacrity with which the maid went off to deliver it; but profited by her absence to make farther inquiries.

It appeared that Derrick's suspicions had been excited by sundry signs and whispers passing the day before between Joe and the under-housemaid; and, though unable to guess the purport, she had watched them so closely, that she detected him slipping into her hand a note and a sovereign. That she said

nothing at the time, but kept strict guard over the girl all the morning, to see what she would do ; and at last caught her coaxing Miss Milly to take the note to Mrs Mornay as a secret. That she had instantly seized upon it, and by threats of instant dismissal and disgrace, frightened Jenny into a full confession. Mr Compton's groom had bribed her, not only to give this note, but to assist his master to an interview with Mrs Mornay, while the family were at church—his toothache being either assumed or exaggerated as a blind to the manoeuvre. That Derrick on learning this had very properly brought the note to her mistress, and acquainted her with the whole affair ; and she was just going to send for Mrs Mornay when Miss Clavering knocked.

'I am particularly glad you happened to do so, Miss Clavering, as it was quite right you should know the truth, and I have not the least objection to your hearing every word I say to her.'

'Thank you ; but will *she* object, do you think ?'

'Really, I should not consider it necessary to inquire.'

'But I should, and I must beg that point may be ascertained distinctly.'

'As you please—as you please. I am the last person to do anything unkind or incorrect. I have a painful duty to do, and I should be glad you witnessed how I did it, and also that for your own sake, and that of my aunt, you should know the exact state of the case ; but, of course, I will not press the point. Come in Mrs Mornay, and be good enough to shut the door. You need not wait, Derrick. If I require you I will ring.'

Derrick reluctantly withdrew, and Eleanor, in great agitation, turned to Mrs Cummings to ask if she had not a letter for her ?

'Not a letter, exactly,' returned that lady, somewhat disconcerted by the audacity of the question, 'only this note, and I wait for an explanation of its being here at all.'

She did not seem to hear this last remark ; she had torn open the missive, and Anne saw how the bright colour faded away in disappointment, as she crushed it in her hand. Whatever Derrick had told her, she had evidently not understood the truth.

'Well, Mrs Mornay,' said Mrs Cummings, after waiting in dignified expectation a few minutes, 'what have you to say to me ?'

Eleanor started as if from a dream. 'I beg your pardon—I thought—I expected—when did this come?'

'When, Mrs Mornay? It was left with my housemaid, to be given to you in private. Derrick very properly brought it to me, and I have done my duty in delivering it to you myself. Now, if you have any objection to answering my questions in the presence of Miss Clavering, you have only to say so. I give you notice I am going to speak very seriously, and you may prefer answering me alone.'

'I can have nothing to say to you, ma'am, that Miss Clavering is not welcome to hear, if she is good enough to listen.'

Anne made a slight inclination of the head, and as Mrs Mornay was not asked to sit down, remained standing herself by the window.

'Then now, Mrs Mornay, what excuse have you to offer for the extraordinary breach of propriety of which I have just discovered you have been guilty, in admitting any gentleman visiting in this house, first to a private interview, and then a clandestine correspondence?'

'You know all that has passed, then, madam? I do not wonder you are displeased, though you could not be more so than I was myself. Mr Compton knew me in better circumstances, and when he found I was in the house, was thoughtless enough not only to send me a message by his servant, but to persist in seeing me, that he might offer me assistance. There is his note if it will be more satisfactory to you to see it.'

Mrs Cummings took the note with considerable curiosity, and read it aloud.

"I relieve you of all nervous anxiety by going away directly. I have not ventured to see you again, but you will hear of me before very long. Meanwhile, I implore you to reconsider my proposal.—Ever yours,

"T. C."

'Very satisfactory indeed, Mrs Mornay,' she said, as she handed it back again, 'very satisfactory as far as the cause of Mr Compton's sudden departure is concerned, though I confess it would not otherwise have occurred to me. Nothing can be more satisfactory, indeed, than the manner in which you have explained the whole affair, with this trifling exception, which of course you can account for. Why was this done as

a secret? Why, if there was nothing to be ashamed of—it is no disgrace to have known better days—any one can see that you have—did not Mr Compton name it to me?’

‘That,’ said Eleanor, looking down, ‘is just what I cannot explain.’

‘Indeed! And why did you not come and tell me yourself?’

‘I wished to do so; but besides your being engaged with visitors, my difficulty was, as it is now, that though every word I say is the truth, I cannot tell you the whole—and I have therefore no right to expect you will believe me.’

‘I am glad you admit that, for I candidly confess, I am far from satisfied—very far indeed. It sounds very plausible that one gentleman should come to talk secretly to you on business, and another in secret to offer you assistance in some way not explained; but I frankly acknowledge I do not like this sort of thing, and to speak plainly, I can put up with it no longer.’

She paused, to observe the effect of her words; Eleanor made no attempt to deprecate her displeasure, but stood with downcast eyes, in an attitude more expressive of dejection than fear.

‘When I took you into my family, Mrs Mornay, I did so under the impression that you were deserving of the kindness shown you. The fact of your being well educated, and your manner and language being all I could wish, made me confident that I could trust you; and though your present situation has been an inferior one, if you had give me satisfaction, I thought of retaining you on better terms, or recommending you to my friends. In that case, I should not have let you leave me without a substantial proof of my approval. This you have entirely forfeited. There is the exact amount due to you according to our agreement. I give you till to-morrow, to make your preparations, and then I must have it distinctly understood that our connection ceases. It will be out of the question for me to give you a recommendation, and I shall attend to no other claim whatever. Have the goodness to see that your money is right.’

‘There is no occasion to do that, madam,’ said Eleanor, gently declining the proffered sum. ‘You owe me nothing.’

‘What do you mean, Mrs Mornay?’

‘I have been paid already, ma’am. If my services have satisfied you, I am perfectly satisfied.’

‘But, Mrs Mornay, you cannot suppose I would consent to be under an obligation to you?’

‘No fear of that, madam,’ said Eleanor, suppressing a sob; ‘on the contrary, I am under obligations to you for having sheltered me through the winter.’

‘Well, well,’ said Mrs Cummings, in a softened tone, for this was quite unexpected, ‘we will talk of that by-and-by, Mrs Mornay. I did not mean to be severe with you; I hope I am not uncharitable; but you must see that it is impossible for me to do otherwise.’

‘I quite admit it, madam.’

‘And you will not think me harsh, if I prohibit my daughters from going into your room. I cannot answer to myself the consequences of allowing Millicent to be taught anything that in the least resembles dissimulation. It sounds cruel to say so, perhaps, but if you had suffered as much as I have from being deceived, you would own it was perfectly just.’

Eleanor curtsied in silence, and had turned to leave the room, when Anne Clavering’s cheerful voice arrested her midway.

‘Mrs Mornay, we shall leave about twelve to-morrow. Will that hour suit you?’

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## CHAPTER XXIV

### MISS CLAVERING’S DISCOVERIES.

CHEERILY crackled and blazed the dry fir logs, piled on the low open grate by Rupert Clavering’s skilful hand; an accomplishment on which he especially prided himself, and for which he was particularly covetous of praise. Tempting looked the table, with its snowy cloth, and bright appendages prepared for the travellers meal, and hospitably dignified was the general aspect of the oak-panelled hall, from the old armour on the walls, dimly reflecting the dancing fire-light, to old Bruno couchant on the rug, with blinking eyes, and ears

quivering with the expectation in which he had been, ever since the departure of his mistress. Arthur reclining on one side of the fire, and Mr Clavering wandering about the house, in and out of the room, and occasionally as far as the gate, were each secretly devoured with impatience, and vigilantly satirical of the other. For it was a great event that was going to happen to them. From the moment that Miss Clavering's maid had arrived, as she did in the middle of the day, with the luggage, announcing the ladies return in the afternoon, the two gentlemen had been in a state of excitement, which the elder could only work off by perpetual motion, and the younger by teasing him. The maid had brought the following note :

‘DEAREST UNCLE,—

‘If you can ever forgive a liberty, try and forgive this. We shall be home in a few hours, and are bringing you a new inmate ; in a word, I have engaged your old favourite, Mrs Mornay, as my companion. I have no time to explain now, except that I have quite changed my mind about wishing to ride this year. Please have everything ready and comfortable for her, and make the best of it to nurse. I shall see by your face when I arrive, whether I may still dare to call myself your loving niece,

‘A. C.’

To say that Uncle Rupert was not startled, or that he did not think his loving niece might have taken a little more time to consider of such a step, would be saying too much ; but Arthur hailed it as the best piece of news he had heard for a long time, and begged to be present when Nurse Moyle was told. Nurse Moyle came, and Nurse Moyle was told, and very serious she looked ; an ominous sign, which at once drove Uncle Rupert into the necessity of seeing the matter in the most felicitous light, and representing it as a benefit conferred on them all—a result which the diplomatic Miss Clavering had most likely foreseen. He expatiated, till his eyes grew moist, on the amiable qualities, the accomplishments, the desolate condition of the lady in question, in hopes of kindling a spark of hospitable zeal in his old friend's bosom ; but Nurse Moyle listened with a respectful gravity, that was her established method of showing disapprobation. In her ordinary temper, she would talk, and scold, and bustle ; but if displeased, her

dignified obedience to orders was something quite imposing, and never had she required so many, or so distinctly given, as on the present occasion. Miss Clavering was to be obeyed, of course ; but she would suggest nothing—devise nothing—remember nothing, that was not stated in plain words ; and Uncle Rupert and Arthur, between them, had to think of everything that could be wanted, to make the stranger feel she was arriving where she was expected and welcome. By the time all this was done, Mr Clavering had grown as eager for her arrival as if it were by his express invitation ; and for the fifth time, had gone out in the cutting wind without his hat, when wheels announced the travellers, and he was just in time to hold the gate open for their fly.

The frown he had put on for his niece was so egregious a failure, it could not even impose on Mrs Sydney, and relieved Anne more completely than if he had smiled. His welcome of Eleanor would have satisfied the most exacting ; its kindness nearly overcame her, and she was glad to be hurried into the oaken hall, where Arthur was waiting to greet her, with both hands held out.

‘Why Bruno—Bruno ! Have you no discernment, no taste, no gallantry, under that tough old hide of yours ?’ remonstrated he, as Bruno, true to his principles, turned up his lip at Mrs Mornay’s approach, and saluted her with a most uncomplimentary snarl. ‘Woe to you, my dear dog, for such a breach of hospitality ! Three hours’ drill to-morrow will be the lightest penance I shall impose, and you may think yourself lucky if I do not send for a hand-organ, and teach you to grind it to a penitential tune. His bark is worse than his bite Mrs Mornay—or perhaps I should say, better, for, in strict confidence, he can hardly bite at all. And so we have got you into our clutches at last ! I always thought Miss Clavering was irresistible, and after this I shall be ready to swear it. You know your fate beforehand. Look here,’—he pulled a tiny bit of watch-chain, with a ring attached, half out of his waistcoat pocket,—‘I armed myself with this directly I heard of your capture. *Lasciate ogni speranza, &c. &c.* You part with your freedom from this moment.’

‘Quite true,’ said Anne, ‘and high time she did, for she has no idea of taking proper care of herself ; and the first thing we have to do, is to make her strong and well, whether she likes it or not.’

They all looked at her as she stood among them, silent



from emotion, her colour fitting with weakness and excitement, and the transparent delicacy of her complexion bearing but too sure testimony to the nature of her hacking cough. They looked at her, and then at each other, though she did not see it, and the forced hilarity with which all began to talk and joke at once, betrayed to each what all were feeling at the same moment. Anne carried her guest off to her room, begging that tea might be ready by the time she came down ; and Uncle Rupert going first to explain why the room next to Arthur's had been fixed upon, and how much discussion there had been before they could fix upon it—Arthur had his grandmother for a few minutes all to himself.

‘Tell me, granny,’ he said, as she sat down by his side, caressing him as if she had been away for a year, ‘what is the meaning of all this ? Where did you find that poor thing and what has she been doing to herself ?’

‘We found her at Millicent's, dear ; she was all the winter there, making the girls' things.’

Arthur gave a low, emphatic whistle. ‘That would account for anything, certainly, No, don't sigh like that I am only teasing you, granny. Of course Cousin Millicent screwed her down, but she would not have a lady in her house without treating her as one.

‘I wish I could say that, my dear boy, with all my heart, but I am afraid it has been quite the contrary. You will hear all the story by-and-by from dear Anne ; I can tell you she is full of it, and I was thankful we got away as quietly as we did. Do you know this poor thing found time with all her hard work, to make friends by little kindnesses, as far as she was able ; and when we got to the station, there was quite a party to wish her good-bye—the clergyman, and his wife and children, and several of the choir, and some girls from the school ; and the clergyman said he did not know what he should do without her help at the organ ; and they gave her keepsakes, and the little ones clung to her, and altogether it nearly upset me. I am sure she must be very amiable to win people's hearts like that.’

‘I hope she will win nurse Moyle's then, granny, for there is ugly weather brewing there, that has kept us poor bachelors in constant bodily fear. I have been Captain Sydneied all the afternoon, and poor Mr Clavering has been nearly beside himself with, ‘If you please, sir, what do you choose to have done about this, that, and the other ?’ We know what it all means,

but Mrs Mornay may not, and one would be vexed that she should be annoyed.'

'My dear boy, if you knew all she has gone through this winter, you would not think a little annoyance would trouble her much. Really,' said Mrs Sydney, drawing a long breath, 'really I feel almost angry with Millicent. I try not to be, but I am.'

'Has it got so far as that? Then, instead of wondering that the poor lady looks so delicate, it is a miracle she is alive!'

Long and eager as were the conferences the four allies held severally and generally on the subject, by common consent all unpleasant by-gones were ignored in the presence of the guest. Resolved as Eleanor had been, when she yielded to Anne's persuasions, that she would at once take her proper place, and showed she had no intention of encroaching on their courtesy and kindness—courtesy and kindness were too strong for her just then; and having no strength to resist, she was fain to allow them to treat her as they pleased. And the consequence was, that she felt that evening, for the first time in many months, that she was in a peaceful home once more. How she loved them for their consideration of her feelings, for the delicacy of their attentions, for the manner in which they conveyed their welcome, without compelling her to be always acknowledging it! She blessed the mercy that had shown her this refuge, even if it should be only for a time. She would not look beyond the present; here she had been brought, without seeking it, and here she must have a work to do, though it might prove to be only of love and gratitude.

She was too resolute on being useful to be kept inactive; it took a very short time for her to glide into a quiet course of small services, which, though always unobtrusive, made a considerable increase in the family comfort. Her music, her conversation, her industrious fingers, were always ready when wanted; and as the severity of the weather confined her a good deal to the house, the resources thus open to Arthur were delightful. It had always fidgeted him to keep Anne by the fireside for his amusement, when he knew she would otherwise be in the fresh air; so that to have Mrs Mornay always happy to play chess, morning, noon, or night, or to sit with her work, an intelligent listener, while he read out scraps of the newspaper or magazine that would have sent his

grandmother to sleep in two minutes—beguiled him of many a weary hour, when he would otherwise have feigned sleep himself to relieve his nurses. Then she would take it in turns with Anne to play backgammon with Mr Clavering, and was always beaten, let her try as hard as she might, which diverted that good gentleman immensely. His niece, by frequent practice, was growing as sharp as himself; so, after a glorious passage of arms with her, it was a harmless recreation to see Mrs Mornay entangle herself in difficulties, and shake her head in hopeless patience over her invariably luckless throws. But the piano was her strong point; there she could charm them all; and as Anne was ashamed to confess indolence, when her teacher was conveniently at hand, her lessons were diligently resumed, with sufficient success to be encouraging. Nothing, in short, was left to be desired in the whole arrangement, but that she would get rid of her cough, and win the good graces of Nurse Moyle.

She did her best in both cases; though resisting the visits of a medical man, she tried, most submissively, the various remedies they proposed to her, not only the old-world prescriptions of Mrs Sydney, but some startling ones which Uncle Rupert had imported from the new; and certainly succeeded in reducing her enemy, though he still clung to his ground.

And all that gentle civility, forbearance, and care to avoid trouble, could do towards disarming aversion, she essayed in her intercourse with Nurse Moyle. She was conscious, from the first, that the good woman eyed her with disfavour, and by degrees the alarming fact made itself evident, that it was with distrust also. Anne had told her all she knew of Mrs Mornay, and Betsey had repeated all she picked up at the Grove, and Nurse Moyle drew her own conclusions.

‘It is all very well, Miss Anne, my dear, but I don’t like ladies as can give no account of themselves, and whose husbands is nowhere.’ She did not like them, but her way of showing it was not like Derrick’s, for she was so scrupulously civil to the stranger, that their intercourse might have served as a lesson on deportment; still, she never relaxed the keen watch she had set on her from the hour of her arrival, and in spite of Eleanor’s caution and reserve, she could not always avoid suspicious circumstances, such a trifle as the envelope of a letter, or an overlooked initial, would now and then give her a sensation of danger, and though she never could perceive that it was observed, there was a steady sternness in the old nurse’s

eye that made her feel almost an impostor. There were, no doubt, various causes for this instinctive aversion; jealousy of Anne's regard, and resentment at not having been consulted, would have made any one unwelcome, with the highest testimonials; then, it made her angry that, for the sake of retaining this new inmate, her master and mistress should have given up their plan of keeping another horse—Uncle Rupert deciding that both luxuries could not be afforded without encroaching on the fund accumulating for the gradual redemption of the estate. They had one already, chiefly on account of the Sydneys, and that must suffice for the present. Nurse Moyle was greatly disappointed, and could not resist the temptation one day of letting Mrs Mornay know she thought her a dear bargain. It gave Eleanor great pain to hear what her coming had cost, and she confided it to Arthur when they were next alone. He comforted her after his own fashion, assuring her Miss Clavering was much happier as it was; he had not seen her so bright since he had had the pleasure of knowing her; and as for the rides, as he should have been half dead with envy, and his grandmother with fright, every time she went out—to say nothing of her infallibly breaking her neck—it might be looked upon as an escape for all parties.

He did not fail, however, to let Anne know what had been said, and the consequence was, that Anne and her old friend had what the former called 'a nursery quarrel,' ending, as a matter of course, in the outward submission of the elder party, who could hold her own against all the world besides, but not against a reproachful look from her darling, and after this was much more guarded in her manner to her darling's new favourite. It was, indeed, so difficult to quarrel with anyone so sweet-tempered, that the truce lasted longer than Eleanor had dared to hope. One April morning, however, when Anne and her uncle were out, and the warm sunshine had tempted Eleanor to ramble alone farther than usual, she lighted on a nook famous for early cowslips, and rejoicing in the discovery, brought all she could find, and was setting them out on Miss Clavering's dressing-table, when Nurse Moyle, who had followed her unobserved, rushed forwards, and caught the glass from her hand.

'How could you think of putting these on Miss Anne's table, ma'am? She can't abide the sight of them; be so good as to take them away before she comes in and finds them here. Or, if you won't,' for Eleanor hesitated, as much from surprise

as disappointment, 'if you won't, I must. She shan't be vexed to please anybody.' And she snatched the flowers out of the water, and walked off with them in her apron.

This was the first open affront Mrs Mornay had received, and she did not know how to take it. She had resolved not to mention any little unpleasantness again; but Arthur soon saw there was something amiss, and was not long in getting out the truth. He pondered a little over the story, before he answered, 'It is curious, but I noticed last spring she did not care for them in the least, when I would have given my little finger for some decent excuse for making a cowslip ball—just once more. There may be some association of ideas that we know nothing about. She had troubles enough in her early life, and they may remind her of some of them. As Hood says, you remember, poor Peggy, hawking bouquets from street to street, grows to hate the smell of roses. Strange!' he continued, musingly, 'how we may go on for months, perhaps years, fancying ourselves intimate with people, and find out, all at once, that we have been walking every day over a mine, as it were, that might have blown us all up, any minute. Well, I must say I should like to see her happily in love; she is so good, she would make a first-rate wife.'

'That she would, assented Eleanor, warmly.

'To tell you a bit of a secret then, Mrs Mornay, her cousin worships the ground she treads on, and Mr Clavering would give half he has in the world to see her return his affection. He is a real good fellow, that Edward Wilton, one of your quiet, steady ones, that nobody talks about, and nobody can get on without, and that would be just the husband for a grand, spirited creature like Anne Clavering.'

'You talk as if you had studied the subject deeply,' said Eleanor, smiling at his unusually serious manner.

'Why, one grows dreadfully old, lying here, to be sure. I feel very like your grandfather sometimes, and almost expect you to ask for my blessing. You may laugh, but when once you know your life is stopped short, and you have nothing left but to wait for your end, you soon grow to fancy everything that happened to you was so long ago, that it would not surprise you to find out you were a hundred.'

'You have some youth left,' she returned, kindly, 'since you can indulge in visions for others.'

'How often do you suppose I have had them for myself? Ah, those cowslips of yours sing me a very different song from

what they seem to do to Nurse Moyle. I love the very sound of their name. I was uncommonly happy where I helped to pick them last, making believe I only did it to please the children—too happy to last. It only did last a little while, but I can never lose that pleasant remembrance, old as I grow every day.'

The sympathy in her eyes was irresistible; he went on almost unconsciously, and for once indulged in the rare relief of bringing his heart's innermost to light. It was the old, old story—of young love under difficulties—of impetuosity thinking parental prudence harsh, and the prohibition to a long engagement evaded as far as conscience would allow, by the passionate vows of eternal constancy that were to conquer fate and time. They had parted in that hope, but it was a parting in real earnest, for her father was bound for Canada with his family, when Arthur was ordered to Gibraltar, before going to the Crimea; so that all that distance and hopelessness could do to loosen hearts, was done for them, but with little success. She was never to be his, he knew; but her image lay cherished as dearly as ever, and he was as sure as if he saw it, that his was as dear to her.

'I do not mean to deny that it makes me very sick sometimes, when I think what it would be to see that door open, and Emily come in—and then calculate how much land and water lies between us: but you know, when one begins to serve, one's life is not one's own, and if I had had my head blown off, it would only have been a quicker way of losing her than this. It would be worse if I were on my legs, and could not go after her, for then I should be always hoping—as she is still, perhaps, remembering me as she saw me last, not the object I am now. Do you know, Mrs Mornay, you remind me of her sometimes, especially when you smile. If you should ever meet her when I am gone, I wish——'

The wish was not expressed; either he could not trust himself, or he changed his mind; for he fell into a reverie, which Eleanor would not interrupt, and the subject was dropped for the time. Occasionally he would return to it, however, as an indulgence to be sparingly enjoyed, and would talk with very little interruption on her part, as if thinking aloud, and though she was rather doubtful whether his night's rest did not sometimes suffer in consequence, she had not the heart to stop him. She had noticed before, that it was a relief to him, now and then, to give vent to the weariness and de-

pression that all his gallant courage could not always conquer. Before Mrs Sydney he was invariably cheerful, and he made it a point of courtesy to be so, if he could, before Anne; but to Mr Clavering he would confess when fairly overpowered by pain; and Eleanor became his safety-valve, when his yearnings over his lost hope was more than he could bear. The evening was the most seasonable time for these confidences. The Claverings, quiet as their habits were, had allowed themselves, to be drawn into a certain amount of visiting, such as became their station, and which to Anne had the charm of novelty; and they could enter into this gentle dissipation with the more comfort, that Mrs Mornay's conversation and accomplishments were available for the solace of their friends at home. On one of these occasions, when the old lady, according to her invariable custom, was nodding behind the *Times*, which she always began to do, music or no music, at the second paragraph of the leading article, but firmly denied when taxed therewith—Arthur produced from his portfolio a manuscript song, in a small, delicate hand-writing, and begged Eleanor, if her cough would permit, to try it over for him. He had found it under the pillow of a brother-officer who died in hospital—a poor fellow whose story was even sadder than his own.

The hopes that we cherish'd,  
 Our parting to soften,  
 Have wither'd and perish'd,  
 As fair things do often.  
 Our spirits' communion  
 No distance can sever;  
 But the dream of reunion  
 Is fading for ever!

The hard world has tried us,  
 Our hearts have grown weary;  
 The realms that divide us  
 Look pathless and dreary.  
 The fire is still burning,  
 That burns for the wholly—  
 But the hope of returning  
 Is dying out slowly.

Ah! couldst thou forget me,  
 Thy lot would be brighter;  
 The griefs that beset me,  
 Unshared, would be lighter.  
 The troth that we plighted,  
 Forget it was spoken,  
 And of those it united,  
 Save *one* heart unbroken!

No, love's dying embers  
Despair may not smother ;  
The one that remembers  
Must hope in the other,  
The heart may be lonely  
That beats on without thee,  
But beats for thee only,  
—And how can it doubt thee ?

The friends gone before us,  
At home we shall find them ;  
The dark clouds hung o'er us  
Have sunshine behind them.  
Then gently and bright fall  
The tears of our sorrow :  
The dews of the nightfall  
Are gems on the morrow !

The air to which these words were set, was a simple melody which Eleanor had no difficulty in mastering, but the words themselves were not so easy, for they stirred up the thoughts she was forced to keep down. She hoped the faltering of her voice would be attributed to her cough. There was a momentary silence when she concluded, and then a low sound of applause, much too near the piano to come from the invalid. She looked round; a gentleman was standing midway between her and the hearth, fair-haired, rather youthful in countenance, but with the clear, steady eye and firm lip that spoke the man of intellect and decision. He had come in while she was singing, and had evidently listened with pleasure, by the warmth of his smile. It was so much her habit to avoid all casual visitors, that she was rather disconcerted at being thus surprised; but Arthur quickly relieved her by naming Mr Edward Wilton, whom she knew so well by report, as to consider him an old acquaintance. He, in return, observed she was anything but a stranger to him, having heard of little else lately, in his cousin's letters; indeed, he could almost have been positive he had had the pleasure of seeing her somewhere before. Her deep blush and evident embarrassment at this unexpected remark, made him change the subject directly, but only to dwell upon it in private; for the more he looked, the more convinced he felt that it had been so, though how, when, or where, he could not conceive.

His own appearance was speedily accounted for. A senior colleague had suddenly altered his plans about his holiday, and had wished to exchange with him; and as it was never expedient to make difficulties with those a step above you



Wilton had agreed at once. It had only been settled the day before, and he had no time to write; so he had taken his wellcome for granted, and come down without delay.

'We are grown gayer people down here than we used to be, so I was not sure of finding Anne at home, but I knew somebody would give me a cup of tea. How is Nurse Moyle, Sydney? I am dreadfully jealous of your progress in that quarter.'

'You need not be, for I assure you I have heard so much of Mr Ed'ard's virtues, that I always keep an oyster-shell ready under my pillow. It is to be hoped, by the way, that she approves of your coming, or we shall have her so awfully respectful, and asking for such distressingly difficult orders about mattresses and pincussions, that, without Miss Clavering to settle her, I don't know what we shall do—do you, Mrs Mornay?'

'Never fear,' said Wilton, starting up, as Mrs Mornay, with rather a troubled expression of face, was about to leave the room, 'allow me to go and arrange with her myself. I have been running in and out of this house, Mrs Mornay, ever since I was ten years old, so you must expect to find me tolerably at home.'

There was no fear of Nurse Moyle being dissatisfied at the arrival of one whom she had always loved, next to Anne. She almost sobbed when he shook hands with her, and he made out something he could hardly understand about 'a weight like a millstone being took off' her neck, now he was come down to see after things.'

'Nobody won't believe an old woman, Mr Ed'ard; but they'll listen to you; only don't you be in a hurry at first. You take your time, and watch, and wait; and when you've made your mind up, you out with it like a man—that's all. Do you hear?'

'Yes; and what is more, I will do it.'

'Then God bless you for coming, and for goodness' sake, go back to the ladies, or I shall never get anything ready for you to eat, or your bed made, or nothing; and if ever any one deserved the best we could give him, it's yourself, and no mistake.'

Whether she would have praised him so much had she understood what he really meant, may be considered among the doubtful problems never to be solved; the immediate effects were sufficiently satisfactory, and he came back to his friends

to make himself generally agreeable, and wile away the time till the others returned. Very agreeable Eleanor found him; less given to *persiflage* than Arthur, but ready to talk, with a kindly cheering tone in all he said, as if he accustomed himself to see the best side of everything and everybody as far as possible, and where *not* possible, to make the best he could of the worst. No one ever heard his name mixed up with any public undertaking of benevolence; but in many a narrow alley, many a dark court, many a loft, and many a cellar, his face was known and loved, as that of one who came, not to lecture or to argue, but to sympathize, comfort, and cheer. These could not even recompense him by making his good deeds known; so nobody did know of them but his parish clergyman, who always felt safe when he had secured Edward Wilton; and one or two of the younger clerks, whom he had quietly allured to try the same humble road to content and peace of mind.

Eleanor thought with tender interest about the approaching meeting between Anne and her cousin; her sympathies had been won by his face, and Arthur's good-will towards him; and she hoped, as Mrs Brown was certainly mistaken in one point, she might have been also in the other. When the carriage really drove up, however, Wilton opened the door for them himself, so their first meeting was only heard not seen. There was no doubt about his welcome, and they came into the light together, both faces so radiant with pleasure that Arthur and Mrs Mornay involuntarily exchanged a smile.

Time had done nothing for Edward Wilton in the way of deliverance; he was as much a slave as ever. Superior to his cousin in intellect and experience and knowledge as he was; he loved to lay his superiority at her feet, to let her treat him as a boy—scold him, contradict, order him about as she constantly did—anything that amused her, and brought a bright smile on her lips, and a saucy sparkle to her eyes. In every gleam of this renewed sunshine, he saw a ray of hope; and an hour's sensible conversation on the subjects that in general interested him most, would not have made his heart flutter with half the glad excitement that it felt when she had been making Mrs Mornay laugh with some of their household stories of his Cockney ignorance, in those bygone days, to which he had for some time not ventured to allude.

His presence gave general pleasure; and as all but Anne understood, and felt with him, he was aided and abetted with

as much subtle address as the party had at command. The weather had become warm and genial ; it was the end of April when he came, and May began sufficiently like the May of the poets, to be a fit season for so gentle a wooing as his. Very gentle it was, every way ; he dreaded venturing his present happiness on one cast, and so long as she was unsuspecting, she was sure to be loving and kind. So he walked and gardened with her and Eleanor—the latter discreetly keeping as much out of his way as she could without attracting notice—and his holiday was fast slipping away without the bold step being taken for which he had mainly come.

‘Edward ! Mrs Mornay ! A discovery !’ Miss Clavering was heard calling one day, when Arthur and his grandmother were out driving, and Uncle Rupert gone to the market town, ‘a discovery worthy of Mrs Radcliffe ! Quick, slaves of the lamp, both of you, for I want your help !’

Eleanor came in at the door, and Edward at the window, in simultaneous obedience, not to say, curiosity. They found her in a state of great excitement, and very dusty about the sleeves, holding in her hand a thin MS. volume, bound in ancient looking vellum, the pages discoloured, and the ink scarcely legible with time.

‘Here is an antiquarian treasure I have just hunted out of an old iron box that nobody can have opened for a century at least. It is a history of Lawleigh and all its owners, and several plans, in pen and ink, of the different rooms, and especially of the hall. But the most curious part of it is—that it speaks of a secret closet behind one of these panels, and gives a clue by which it is to be found, of which I can make nothing at all. Read it, Edward, for yourself, instead of looking so wise and incredulous ; and then, if ever you had a spark of clanship in your soul, find out the puzzle, for it is all Hebrew to me.’

Edward did feel incredulous, for secret closets do not turn up every day in the nineteenth century ; and devoted son of Lawleigh as he was, his first idea was that it might be some hoax of a bygone wit—the reality sounded too good to be true.

‘There is one thing in favour of there really being a secret in the case,’ he said, after studying the MS. a little while, ‘it has evidently been kept from the ladies of the family, for the directions are all in Latin, and as far as my humble scholarship can tell, in very bad Latin too.’

'The worst Latin is that which one cannot understand,' said Anne, 'and that, I suppose, is your case, by your criticisms.'

'Not exactly; I think I can find the thing, if it really exists.'

'If it exists! Why, I would swear to it simply from that record alone. What sort of an antiquary would you make, with so little faith? Come, if you find this treasure, I promise you the honour and glory of showing it to Uncle Rupert.'

'Then, if it is not asking an impossibility of two ladies I shall beg the favour of their remaining silent for a few minutes.'

He sat down, and became absorbed in the MS. : presently he began making calculations on the back of a letter: the ladies watching him as if he had been performing the black art, but preserving an heroic silence. At last he got up, and walked straight to the panel nearest the large fire-place, and applying his whole force to one particular spot, which he ascertained by careful measurement, had the satisfaction, after a short struggle, of feeling the spring yield, and the hidden door, which it really was, fly in a few inches, revealing a dark interior.

'Here is your closet, certainly,' he said, putting his head cautiously to the opening, 'and uncommonly fusty it is too. Keep back, both of you,' as with a joyful exclamation they pressed forwards, 'it is ghostly sort of work, and I may have a skeleton of a lady in her bridal attire tumbling into my arms, if I don't look out. Would one of you be so kind as to give me a light?—the taper will do. Thank you, Mrs Mornay. Ah, there is some ventilation inside, somewhere, for you see there is draught enough to blow the flame about: so far, so good. If I can push it farther open, I will heroically explore it for you.'

The pivot on which the door turned had probably grown very rusty, for it was no easy matter to widen the entrance. As soon as he could, however, Wilton squeezed himself in, and held the taper above his head, while announcing his discoveries.

'No very extensive addition to your apartments, Anne—nearly eight feet by six, I should say; tolerably high, though, and about as dirty a hole as I ever had the pleasure of standing in. If you are curious in the matter of spiders, now is

your time ; and to judge by the blackness of the walls, the air does come from the chimney, and a little smoke into the bargain. Eugh !' as he scrambled out again, shaking the cobwebs from his coat and hair, 'I do not envy the interesting fugitive who was hidden there—I cannot say I do.'

As, however, the fact of its being in this neglected state was proof positive of its antiquity, all this only added to Anne's delight. She bound her companions to inviolable secrecy, as Uncle Rupert's birthday was coming on, and she was planning a *coup de théâtre* worthy of the occasion, when at a given signal one of them would undo the spring, and she would appear within, with a bouquet in one hand, and in the other an elegant copy of verses of Edward's composing. 'Be quiet, Edward ; if I tell you I want them, they must be done, and that you know.'

'Vastly well,' replied he ; 'but there is one thing I must venture to observe, that if you mean to look becoming on so joyful an occasion, we must clean the place out, or you will more resemble the 'starred Ethiop queen,' than a respectable country gentleman's niece'

'Well, it would not do to make Uncle Rupert think one of his aboriginal acquaintance had come to visit him, certainly ; so you must oil the spring, and do something to make the door open more easily. Thomas has plenty of all that you will want—only tell nobody for your life—do you hear ?'

'Wild horses shall not tear it from me,' said he gaily, as he ran off ; speedily returning with tools and other appliances, with which he laboured diligently, till it was time to desist for fear of detection. Every trace of dust and carpentering was carefully removed, and the precious volume hidden in Anne's desk. But at every favourable opportunity, Edward renewed his labour, until he had conquered the difficulty of the opening, and made the interior, as he said, fit for a gentlewoman's china and sweetmeat closet, which it was his heretical opinion was the homely purpose for which it was intended. On one occasion, however, he thought he would try the spring inside, and having shut himself in, discovered that he could not open it again. Luckily for the secret, Eleanor was standing by, and after some difficulty and alarm, she succeeded in releasing him. He laughed to see how frightened she was, declaring it was something to be able to realize even for a few minutes, what it would be to be lying *perdu* there, dependant on the fidelity of your friends. He owned, however, that five minutes in such

a dark hole was quite long enough: the gloom was too oppressive to endure very long. He took care to make the spring much easier after that, and practised Mrs Mornay every day in its use, till she could open it without difficulty or bruising her hands.

Anything like a party at Lawleigh, in Arthur's state of health, was of course out of the question; but Anne was not the less resolved on her uncle's birthday being kept with due honour, and chose the method most acceptable to himself, by arranging a dinner for a certain number of aged poor in the kitchen, and a maypole for the children, in one of the fields lately recovered. The *coup de théâtre* of the secret closet was to be reserved till evening, when their guests were gone, though it seemed highly doubtful to the last minute whether Wilton's elegant copy of verses would be ready. They certainly were not the night before; and all that could be got out of him was, that his genius never would show itself until just at the right time; the real danger was, that when once the poetic fervour began, there would be no stopping it—and instead of an ode on one closet, they would have a poem on the whole house, from the attics to the scullery.

Uncle Rupert had been living for several days in a state of conscientious hypocrisy, feigning, as he flattered himself, with great address, not to know anything about the preparations for his birthday—shutting his ears to culinary discussions, and his eyes to mysterious performances in needlework, that Mrs Mornay was not always nimble enough to hustle out of his way. Even when he met a load of school forms coming in at his gate, compelled him to stand by till they had passed, he only nodded and smiled as pleasantly as if it was the most natural thing in the world for slightly decayed and decidedly inky upholstery to be making itself at home on his premises. But it must be confessed, he was not sorry when the morning came, and he was able to enjoy the use of his faculties without reservation. He affected, indeed, to wish people would not notice one's birthday—it was growing too serious a matter—he was sure his register was twenty years wrong—and so forth; but his bright face and joyous manner belied his words. All the unexpected offerings, moreover, were received with undisguised pleasure—Edward's beautiful print, and Anne's handsomely-bound volumes, and Mrs Sydney's knitted quilt, and Mrs Mornay's bead purse, and Arthur's walking-stick—and last, not least, a huge yellow and red pocket-handkerchief

from Nurse Moyle, which he pronounced the most perfect bit of colour he had seen for months, and persisted in using immediately. To add to his satisfaction, the Australian mail brought him some expected letters, with flourishing reports of his property : and after pondering over one of these for some time, he called to his nephew. 'Edward! here is an opening for you. My friend tells me that if I know of any young man, with a small capital, and intelligence and energy to use it, now is the time for him to make a handsome independence. He must be a clever fellow and not afraid of work or fatigue. Here is his letter—what do you say?'

Wilton coloured as he took the letter, and his eyes involuntarily sought that of Anne. She was smiling, as at something too ridiculous to be seriously discussed ; seeing which he smiled too, ran a hasty, patronizing glance over the closely-written sheet, and returned it with a gay, 'Much obliged, uncle. I have a great respect for Australia, but there is metal more attractive at home. I wish, though,' he added, after a pause, 'that I could give the chance away'

'You would give your head away if anyone thought it worth having. Of whom were you thinking now?'

'Of a poor young fellow who has no capital, so he is out of the question. He tried to get into our office, but failed in his examination : he has been rather wild—got into scrapes at Cambridge, and has been reaping the fruits ever since, for his father died under very distressing circumstances, and his family are struggling and poor.'

'What is his name, poor fellow?'

'Tresham—Herbert Tresham. His father was a London clergyman, and his death left them all unprovided for.'

'Is his mother living?' asked Mrs Mornay, in a low voice.

'Yes ; she and his sisters tried to set up a school, and they hoped a great deal from their Indian connexion—Mrs Tresham's father having been in the Company's service—but the friend she relied on is dead, and they have no means of extending their interest.'

'Is his sister—are either of his sisters married?'

'Not that I know of. One is engaged to her father's curate, poor thing—and they want to get him an Indian chaplaincy, among other things. In short, they want whatever they can get, and this young fellow who ought to be keeping them all, has his debts always round his neck, can-

not find any employment, and it is all we can do to keep him from going down-hill. If he once takes to drink, we shall lose him.'

'Why did you not bring him down with you?' said Mr Clavering. 'Why did you not name his case before? Mind we talk it over by-and-by, Ned, and see what we can do. I have no interest in India, but in Australia I may give them a lift.'

The conversation continued for some time after this, but Eleanor took no more part in it, and escaped to her room as soon as she could.

There Anne went in search of her, an hour or two later, having just received a basket of hothouse flowers from a friend some miles off, in honour of the day; and being on the point of setting out to walk with her uncle, she wanted Mrs Mornay to fill her glasses for her. She knocked, and thinking she was invited to enter, opened the door, thus taking her friend rather more by surprise than she intended. A letter, which Anne could not help seeing was addressed to somebody in Bengal, lay sealed on the table, and she was examining an article Miss Clavering had never seen in her possession—a small handsome jewel-box, lined with purple velvet. She blushed, and seemed somewhat distressed by Anne's look of surprise, but explained at once, that these were some of her last resources, and she was considering how much they would fetch.

'You see the setting is new, all in the present fashion, so they ought to bring nearly their original value,' she said, with a sigh, as Anne, whose curiosity was excited, took up the elegant diamond neck ornament, which, as her husband's nuptial gift, had been cherished among the last. Miss Clavering admired, and sympathized, and conjectured, but could give no information. Her cousin, Mr Wilton, might be of more service: she would answer for his readiness, if Mrs Mornay liked to consult him. She longed to ask questions, but as confidence was not offered, could not invite it, and watched in silence, while Eleanor replaced her beloved jewel into its case, sighing again as she did so, from the bottom of her heart.

'Must it really be done?' asked Anne, at last, pitying what she thought she understood.

'It must,' was the reply. 'I ought to be glad that it can.'

'And this,' taking up another case that was unopened, 'are these diamonds too? May I look?'



She did not wait for permission, but opened it before Eleanor looked round.

‘Where did you get this?’

Eleanor started at the tone, and seeing to what she referred, hesitated in her reply.

‘Did you not hear me? I asked where you got this bracelet? Can you not answer a plain question in plain words? Who gave it to you?’

‘I do not know,’ said Eleanor, hurt by her manner.

‘You do not know how you came by it?’

‘Only that it came to me anonymously, the day before my marriage.’

‘Your marriage?—may I examine it?’

‘Certainly.’ There was a short silence while Anne’s head was bent over the bracelet; Eleanor wondered what had so suddenly altered her voice, her manner, and whole expression of her face.

‘And you never discovered from whom this came?’ said Miss Clavering, presently. She had partially recovered herself, and was outwardly calm.

‘Never.’

‘You have no suspicion—no clue whatever?’

‘None.’

‘It is a singular story. I was struck with the bracelet, having seen one like it somewhere. When they are made like this, they generally have something in the clasp. Have you found anything?’

‘No; it was suggested, but we could find no spring.’

‘Another secret? Well, after our cleverness down-stairs we may hope to succeed anywhere. Let me see what I can do.’

She tried for some minutes; Eleanor looked on with a melancholy smile, thinking of the scene when that ill-omened trinket arrived, whose temporary importance had been so dwarfed by subsequent events, she could recall it now with less emotion than many others. ‘You will find nothing, I assure you,’ she was just beginning to observe, when the hidden spring yielded to the once familiar fingers, and the clasp opening, revealed an exquisitely finished miniature of Frederick Atterbury.

## CHAPTER XXV

## THE CLOUDS RETURN AFTER THE RAIN.

ELEANOR gave a faint cry, and would have caught it from Anne's hand, but the latter held it fast, and they remained silently looking at it together.

'A very beautiful miniature,' said Anne, at last.

'Very,' said Eleanor, who could hardly see it for her tears.

'A fine face—don't you think so?'

There was a faint murmur in reply; all the wife could give.

'Depend upon it there has been some story connected with this—it looks like the work of some old painter. There may have been a world of romance in the giving and parting with such a token.'

Eleanor shook her head.

'You think not, Mrs Mornay? You ought to know, certainly—and yet—look at it closely. It is so well painted, it must have been a likeness, and a likeness of one beloved.' She paused, and then went on in a lower tone, 'Can you imagine a woman dreaming of that face—living on the music of those lips—reading, with more than Magian faith, the starlight of those eyes—setting up that image for her whole soul's devotion—and finding it one day broken, and only clay after all?'

'No, no,' said Eleanor, too agitated herself to notice that Anne was so, 'broken, fallen, trampled on, it may be—but still precious—more precious than gold!'

'That is your belief? I envy you your charity. And after all, what can it matter, if we do not know who it is.' She shut the clasp, but retained the bracelet in her hands. 'Mrs Mornay I have taken a fancy to this thing. As you have no particular attachment to it, should you be disposed to name its price?'

'I cannot sell it' I promised to keep it till I discovered the sender.'

'That is unfortunate. And if that mythical personage is never discovered?'

'I must wait a little while longer at any rate. Dear

Miss Clavering, I wish you had set your fancy on anything else of mine—this I could not part with to any one.'

'Not if I ask it of you—my first request?'

'You are too generous to press me beyond my power ; you are only trying me, I know '

'Exactly so ; I was only trying you.' Anne gave her back the bracelet, and turned to leave the room. 'I have tried you, Mrs Mornay, and what is more, I know you now. Remember,' she added, with a smile Eleanor could not understand, as she paused a moment at the door, 'I have asked you a favour, and you have refused me.'

The smile was still on her lips as she closed the door behind her ; but she had held out almost too long. Escape observation she must now at any cost, and she fled from the house through the garden, to a retired sunny nook where she had often sat with Atterbury in the olden time, and flung herself down on the warm turf, grasping, sobbing, struggling as for life, beneath the weight that seem to crush down heart and brain ; unable to weep, to cry out, to do anything but sob for breath in such an agony as could only be likened unto the last. How long this endured she never knew—such minutes have no measure.

'My love—my dearest—my own darling ! What is it ? what is it ?' murmured a tender voice in her ear, as she was raised from the ground, and supported on a strong arm, while a hand unfastened her hat and cloak. 'My own, own dear, bear up—you will soon be better—there, don't try to talk—rest your head quietly, and you shall tell me all about it presently.'

Blind, almost unconscious to the outer world as she was, her senses instinctively responded to the voice and touch of love ; hardly knowing what she did or said, she clung round her unseen supporter, with the bitter, half-stifled, long forbidden cry, 'Frederick ! Frederick !' It was but for a moment ; the act of speaking recalled her recollection, and, raising herself with a start, she looked wildly in her cousin's face.

'Oh Edward—his wife, his wife !' And then she bowed her head in her hands and wept bitterly.

He waited till this burst was over for he saw it gave relief, before he tried to understand its immediate cause ; but when he would have questioned her, she shrank from him as he had not seen her do for many a day.

'Why is it that I am always to be exposed to your contempt ? Is not my own enough to bear ?'

'My dearest Anne, you know better than that. You know that nothing can alter my respect for you—certainly not your sorrows.'

'Sorrow like mine is a sin. Could I behave and feel like this, if I were not so despicable, that I hate myself only next to—Edward, do you remember what I told you once—when my hour of darkness was on me as it is now? You need not speak. I know what you would say—you would remind me of my better self, my Christian principles, my womanly feeling, and it would be all of no use yet. I must be alone—or I shall make you hate me too. I wish I was in my room—can you get me there.'

'Of course I can. Lean all your weight on me, and you will be there very soon.'

'Will you ask Uncle Rupert to take his walk? I have got a headache, tell him, and must lie down; but I shall be better by-and-by—or worse, if that is possible. Don't let any one come to me—above all keep Mrs Mornay away.'

'No one shall disturb you, trust to me.'

They reached her room unobserved, and having seen her stretch herself on her bed, he went in search of her uncle.

As Anne had left him nearly an hour ago, Mr Clavering was growing rather impatient—as impatient, that is, as he could bear to feel on such a day; the first birthday for so many, many years that he had felt so joyously happy, so specially blest. To be among his dear ones, in his father's house, seeing the old stock reviving slowly, but surely, under his care—with means at his disposal for making others' hearts as glad as his own, was enough to make his eyes dim with the grateful tears that had choked his voice that morning when he offered up his thanksgiving. Everything seemed to be tending as his dearest wishes would have them; and he had only now to persevere in his labour of love, and leave the dear hands that closed his eyes to gather the fruit from the trees he planted.

'Have you seen my niece anywhere, Mrs Mornay?' he was just asking of Eleanor, who was setting out the flowers, which she had found forgotten.

'Not since eleven o'clock, sir. I think she went out.'

'Impossible! Why, she knew I was going with her. Ah well,' recollecting himself; 'I suppose I must not be inquisitive. Here comes Ned; depend upon it, he knows, the young vagabond. I say, you sir, what have you done with your cousin Anne? I have been waiting for her this last hour.'

'She has a headache, sir, and is gone to lie down.'

'A headache?' His countenance fell in a moment. 'Who is with her? How did it come on? Mrs Mornay, would you be so good as to see if there is anything she would take?'

'I beg your pardon,' said Wilton, stopping Eleanor as she was about to obey, 'my cousin particularly begged not to be disturbed. She will come down when it is time to receive the children, but she hopes you will take your walk, sir, without waiting any longer.'

Uncle Rupert sighed and turned slowly to the door; all his gladness of spirit gone. 'Come with me a little way, Ned, will you? I want to ask you a question. Tell me,' when they were fairly out of every one's hearing—'tell me, in one word what this means. Have you spoken to her?'

'No,' said Edward, in a choked voice.

'Are you going to speak?'

'No.'

'You have not quarrelled—you, whose love I thought like that of angels—quarrelled and made her wretched?'

'Far from it, uncle; she is wretched—but not through me.'

'The old wound still?'

'Yes. Don't ask me how I know it, for it was only by accident, but it is certain. Uncle, I want to ask you seriously—am I fit for that berth in Australia?'

'You never mean to say you wish to go? Why, I thought your heart was bound up in the old country.'

'Uncle, while I had a hope, I would not have left England for all you could offer me. Yesterday—this morning—I had a great deal of hope—I have none now.'

'Poor boy! Is it as bad as that? Come on, and let us talk this over where we can do it calmly.'

They walked on without another word, till they came to the churchyard; and Uncle Rupert leading the way to the large massive monument that marked the tomb of his race, removed his hat, and stood silently as was his wont, for a few minutes. Then he laid his arm on Wilton's shoulder, and drew him gently nearer.

'There he rests, Ned, who loved her more dearly than his life, and who trusted to us to mend any mistake he made in his over-indulgent guardianship. That he did make a mistake, God bless him, he felt, I know, by his last note to me. Ah, if I had only known! But it is done, Ned, and now it remains to

be considered what our duty is towards her. I will do my best while I live, but these birthdays cannot come round very often, and when I am gone, if you are away, where will Anne find one of her own to lean upon ? ’

‘ I would die for her, uncle, but I cannot live without a hope. Show me one, and I will bear everything as I have borne already ; set a period for me to look forward to, and I will wait for it ; as I have waited already ; but unless I have something, I can bear it no longer. To see what I have seen to-day, makes me feel, even *here*, that if I could but find that man, every tear of hers should be paid for ! ’

‘ Hush, boy, hush—we are on holy ground. Leave wrong to be set right where *these* have gone to wait for us. There, there,’ for Wilton had bowed his head on the iron railing, and his shoulders shook with his sobs, ‘ I don’t think the worse of you either for your spirit or your tenderness ; I have generally seen them go together. But we must think of nothing now but her ; time enough for our own feelings when hers are at rest.’

‘ Quite time, uncle. Thank you. If you are going farther, I think now I shall go home.’

His uncle did not detain him ; he sat down on a neighbouring stone, watched his figure pass slowly out of sight, and then turned again to the monument, where the name of Henry Clavering stood clear and fresh with vigilant care.

‘ Oh, brother, brother ! ’ he sighed to himself, ‘ if I had only known ! What was fortune, what was our name, what was Lawleigh itself, compared with the peace and happiness of two such precious hearts ? ’

Contrary to general expectation, Anne came down to the early dinner, looking wretchedly ill, and hardly tasting anything, but trying to talk, and cutting short all inquiries about her health. She received the children as they came, and exerted herself, in spite of all entreaty, to set them at the promised games, and make the afternoon as delightful as their fancy painted it. She went into the kitchen when Mr Clavering’s health was drunk, smiled and talked to one and another, without the least knowing what she said ; and when, according to previous arrangement, the *Fine Old English Gentleman* was sung, made a desperate effort to lead off the chorus. This was just too much ; her voice, went, she knew not how or where, and she had to slip back to her room in

haste, for fear the old people's pleasure should be damped by the sight of her agitation.

Nurse Moyle followed her, in spite of her signs to be left alone, and, by coaxing and caressing, prevailed upon her to go to bed. She asked no questions, but the tenderness of her manner showed that she saw something had occurred, and her fondling was, perhaps, the only remedy Anne's brain could have borne at the moment. Eleanor came to entreat for admission, but was promptly given to understand that Miss Clavering was not to be disturbed. When she was not quite well, she liked to have no one about her but them who was used to her ways; and if Mrs Mornay was asked for, she should be let in—not before. So Mrs Mornay, with a heart full of new undefined trouble, had to go down-stairs again, and show her loyalty to her friend by playing with the school-children, till she had no breath left. All made it a point of honour to prevent Anne from being too much missed, and appeared the more lively from being more or less out of spirits; so the children, happy little mortals! never found out that anything was the matter. They were rather sorry for Miss Clavering's head-ache, but they had their holiday, and their fun, and no end of tea and cake, and the ladies and gentlemen were very kind and amusing, and they could not help enjoying themselves. So greatly, indeed, did old and young enjoy themselves, that a glowing description appeared in the *Englishman's Charter*, a county paper, whose editor had received sundry good turns from Uncle Rupert; and who expatiated eloquently on the virtues of the good old stock, fervently hoping that every day of that excellent gentleman's life might be as happy as this, his sixtieth birthday.

Anne professed herself well the next day, and went about her usual avocations; but all saw too plainly that the cloud had not passed away. Her abstraction, her feverish thirst, her hastiness under small irritations, were tokens they knew too well; but, in this instance, there was a marked difference from former ones. She was evidently struggling to overcome so inward influence, that at times mastered her in spite of all her efforts. And no one could help seeing, what Eleanor discovered at once, the change in her manner to herself. She shunned her eye—avoided speaking to her—answered her briefly and coldly, and declined all her attentions, almost with loathing. So marked did this aversion become, that Eleanor, after bearing it some time, in hopes the old kindness would

return, finding all her gentle attempts at conciliation in vain, began to think seriously of withdrawing from her situation. She spoke to Mrs Sydney and Mr Clavering, but they silenced her at once with the assurance that Anne would never forgive them—when she came to herself, she would be different—Mrs Mornay must try and be patient: they were very, very sorry, but it would be punishing them all if she went away, and Anne would feel it acutely. So she remained; but though she endured, without a shadow of irritability, the altered looks and manner that gave her such hourly pain, she could not keep up the appearance of cheerfulness under them. The sound of Miss Clavering's step, that had so gladdened her once, now made her start and tremble; she shrank from her notice as much as possible, and never addressed her without a degree of nervous dread that made her life a burden. She felt, indeed, that this could not go on much longer; she must have an explanation soon; and yet, a mutual fear of being alone together, made the opportunity slow in coming. Once, however, when they were accidentally left by themselves, and had been sitting some time in silence, she happened to lift her head from her work, and met Anne's eyes watching her with an earnest, mournful gaze, so full of strange emotion, mingled with pity, that her heart throbbed with hope, and the look she returned pleaded hard for reconciliation. Now or never, she felt the risk must be run, and she thought she could read something in those wistful eyes, that told her she would be met half way, if she would begin. But it was a risk, and her voice failed her more than once, till Anne roused herself from her reverie to ask if she had spoken to her?

'I was trying to speak to you—to ask you——'

'What?'

'How long my punishment is to last?' said Eleanor, gaining courage with the sound of her own voice.

'For what?' asked Anne, with a quick change of colour.

'Ah, that is what I long to know. If I knew my fault, I could hope to win my pardon.'

Anne smiled sadly and bitterly, but made no answer.

'I know I have offended you, and I cannot find out how. I am condemned unheard. Be generous, and tell me the truth. I owe you so much, that your displeasure makes me very unhappy.'

'I never said you had offended me, did I?'

'Yes; your altered manner has said so every day.'



'Has my manner altered? It is very possible. People do alter constantly; it should not surprise you.'

'They have some cause when they do.'

'Very true; and I have cause. I thought I had found a friend whom I could love.'

'I thought so too. I hoped so.'

'But you see, Mrs Mornay, I did not know you then as I do now, which makes all the difference. Mrs Cummings was not so far wrong, after all.'

'Oh, Miss Clavering! and this from *you*! What have I done to deserve it?'

'It is not what you have done, but what you *are*, that has made *me*—what I am.'

'What is that?'

'What should you say yourself, now you have had a little experience?'

'Do not ask me. Let me think of what you were when I met you first—when you made me love you, whether I would or not. You must do more than this if you wish to undo that.'

'Your love and patience can stand a great deal.'

'They had need, Miss Clavering; for they are all I have to give.'

Anne half raised herself to look full into the beseeching face, and her eyes glistened with emotion.

'Call me everything that is unreasonable, unfeeling, unjust—whatever you will. You have but too good reason for all.' She rose with a heavy sigh, and murmuring as she did so, 'Fate and I are very cruel to you, poor thing'—laid her hand one moment on Eleanor's shoulder, and then hurried out of the room.

After this conversation there certainly was a change in her manner to Eleanor; she no longer kept her at a distance, and treated her with more gentleness; but her spirits were, if possible, more depressed than before, and her friends began to be uneasy. Wilton's holiday was approaching its end, and he grew so wretched at the idea of leaving Anne in this state, that he resolved on going up to town before it was quite expired, to try what a little confidential talk with a friendly chief would do, towards getting an extension of leave. Uncle Rupert gave him a private *carte-blanche* to bring back young Tresham, if he thought it expedient; and Eleanor entrusted him with her diamonds, which he promised, if possible, to

dispose of for her. Anne seemed to feel his going so much, that he could hardly go at all, and came to the resolution, that if he was refused his extra leave, he would throw up Her Majesty's service altogether, even if he had to go to Australia in consequence.

'Here is a pretty piece of business!' said Uncle Rupert, coming into the hall where the ladies were at work, the day after his nephew's departure, 'this comes of all that fine, flourishing rigmarole about my birthday in that absurd *Charter* the other day. Here is a fellow come pestering me with a long-written prospectus of a work he means to bring out, a series of photographic views of all the old family seats in the country, and begging permission to begin with Lawleigh, as one of the oldest, and as having been so lately the scene of so interesting a celebration. I should have thought it an imposition, but he gives very respectable references; and trusts to the courtesy of the Fine Old English Gentleman to consent to a step which will gratify so many. A parcel of stuff! As if anybody will care to see old Lawleigh photographed—or as if Lawleigh was anything so very famous after all! I have a great mind to send him about his business.'

But to this the public in-doors would not consent. They saw well enough that he was only waiting to be persuaded, and was, in reality, rather delighted than otherwise; and Anne having confessed that she had often wished for a view of her dear home, it was agreed that the courtesy of the Fine Old English Gentleman should be allowed to justify its reputation. A civil leave being granted accordingly to the photographer, he hastened back to the village inn for his camera and apparatus, and lost no time in setting to work. The expectations of the party, which had been raised rather higher than there was any reason for, were somewhat damped by the appearance of a bulky, red-haired German, all beard and spectacles, talking a mixture of bad English, worse French, and decidedly unintelligible Saxon, to the despair of every one who tried to ask him a question. He seemed very independent in his ways—nodded when satisfied—shook his head when plied with suggestions,—and paid very little heed to anything but his task. He declined going into the house to dine, but took his meal at the door of the shed which had been given up to his mysteries; and afterwards smoked a short black pipe with a stolid philosophy that considerably nettled old Thomas.

'You make yourself at home, I'm thinking,' he observed, pausing, wheelbarrow in hand, to look at the stranger.

'Ja,' said the German, as well as his pipe would let him. 'Goot house—goot old man—pretty maidens—just!'

Thomas went on indignantly. Things were come to a pass now with Crystal Palaces and Rooshian wars, if foreign scum of the earth were to be giving their opinions of family seats, and their masters and mistresses, in that off-hand way, too! He didn't like the looks of the chap, and he only hoped he weren't a French beggar of a spy in disguise. He urged Adam, in whose acuteness and strength he had great confidence, to keep his eye on the fellow, that he didn't slip in at the window after the spoons; a commission which seemed to afford that retainer considerable amusement, for he hung about all day, taking a view of the stranger at every possible angle, and marking down in his mind every article of dress, every turn of his hair and beard, as well as everything he said and did. The artist did not trouble himself much about this *espionage*, but revenged himself in his own way, by taking his portrait full length, and handing it to Mr Clavering, with a sentence impossible to understand literally, but purporting that a likeness of that kind was sometimes very useful to the police. After this, Adam kept more warily at a distance; but watched, if possible, more keenly than before. The stranger slept at the inn, but spent the whole day at his work, which was not successful at first, and seemed likely to be a slower operation than had been expected.

Of course, the whole village knew what was going on, and there was a constant influx of visitors to inspect and suggest, and, in one or two instances, to bespeak the artist for themselves. Unluckily, the difficulty of intercourse seemed to increase instead of diminish, and after several ineffectual attempts to come to an understanding, a despairing message was sent into the house, to beg the help of the ladies. Which of them would come and talk German to this idiot, who couldn't understand plain English, even when shouted into his ear, or considerately broken to suit his feeble ideas of grammar? Anne was suffering from one of her oppressive headaches, and hardly seemed to notice the message, and Eleanor saw it must be attended by herself if by any one. Rather nervous, as English ladies usually are when their knowledge is unexpectedly required to be useful, she went

out on the lawn, where the gentlemen were collected round the camera, and asked how she could be of service.

'Oh, come,' said Mr Clavering, turning at the sound of her voice, 'now we shall get on famously, for this lady knows and can do everything. Mrs Mornay, we are all so stupid here, we cannot make this gentleman understand that the Vicar wishes to know if he could take three views of the interior of the church before he goes, and what would be his charge?'

Eleanor translated the inquiry in the best German she could command; but she had to repeat it twice, rather to her discomfort, with the gentlemen crowding impatiently round, each eager to have his remarks made intelligible immediately, and wondering, when people professed to speak a language they did not make themselves understood. The photographer returned a brief answer, to the effect that it could be done, but his charge he could not name without a little calculation; and leaving his apparatus, he walked deliberately to the shed where his plates were kept, making a sign to Mrs Mornay to follow.

Mr Clavering gave her his arm, and they walked together to the door. The German was writing with the stump of an old pencil on a scrap of paper, and did not turn his head till he had finished, when he handed the uninviting billet to the lady, and, for fear of losing time, began stuffing tobacco into his pipe.

Uncle Rupert put on his spectacles, and looked over Eleanor's shoulder.

'What do you call that, my dear? Is it the German character, or Egyptian hieroglyphics?'

She made no reply.

'Can you make it out? You must be uncommonly clever if you can.'

Still no answer; she stood looking first at the writing, then at the writer, as if all her faculties were gone.

'You no understand?' said the latter, stretching out his hand to the paper.

'I don't think she does,' said Mr Clavering. 'Suppose we see what Arthur can do. He has a smattering of the tongue, I fancy.'

'No, no, I understand,' stammered Eleanor, 'it was only——'

'The smell of all those poisonous chemicals, making you feel uncomfortable—I am sure of it. There, do not think

any more about it, but come and sit down a minute. What am I to say to the Vicar ?'

She looked as if she did not comprehend the question. The German, who was striking a light, spoke to her rather quickly. She started, and hurriedly explained that the terms were left to the liberality of the employer.

'A very unbusiness-like way of doing things,' said Uncle Rupert, and one I would never agree to for a moment, but the Vicar can please himself. I say, sir, you are not going to smoke in the lady's face, I hope. She has had quite enough to give her a headache without that.'

'*Ja, ja,*' said the German, coolly taking the paper from Eleanor's passive hand, and after twisting it up, applying it to his lighted match. 'Ver goot for headache,' he pronounced, holding his pipe between his teeth, 'ver goot. *Ja.*'

'But I say, no ; so if you choose to smoke, don't stand so near the lady, do you hear ? If he does, it is not of much use, as he cannot understand. You had better go in, my dear, while I let Mr Wynne know.'

He turned away as he spoke ; the German waited a moment, passed close to Mrs Mornay, and exchanged a few words ; after which he followed Mr Clavering, and she returned to the house.

There are some days that are so long, it seems an insult to our reason to reckon them by the usual allowance of hours and minutes. Such a day was this to Eleanor Atterbury. The scene just described took place in the morning ; in the afternoon, Mr Clavering, having business to transact in the town, set off, according to his active habit, to walk there. Soon after his departure, Anne's indisposition took a turn that dismayed her anxious guardians. She seemed unable to rest, or to be still for two minutes, but walked up and down, and in and out of the rooms, sometimes with her hand pressed to her head, with such a look of weary distress, as went to all their hearts to see. Now and then she would sit down, and suffer Eleanor to hold a cool lotion to her burning temples ; and then would suddenly start up from under her hand, as if its light touch were agony, and resume the restless wandering till she was again tired out. In vain her nurse tried to get her to bed ; she went once to her room, but in five minutes was down-stairs again, confessing that she could not bear to be alone—she did not know why. An attempt was made to

induce her to see Arthur's medical attendant when he called, but to no purpose; and they were obliged to promise no one should see her without her consent. All were thankful when, about six o'clock, Uncle Rupert returned, rather tired, but fresh and cheerful from his walk, and little prepared for the worn, anxious faces he found waiting for him. His presence, however, had an immediate good effect. Anne seemed cheered, and grew gradually quieter; and when he produced a letter, announcing that Edward had carried his point, and would be with them the next day as early as possible, brightened up sufficiently to take a heavy load off the hearts of her companions. The tea was brought in, and Uncle Rupert, seeing the urgency of the case kept talking on as cheerfully as if nothing was the matter, of all he had seen and done since they parted.

'I did one very stupid thing, though, Arthur; very unlike me, I must say. This letter of Ned's came, of course, by the second post, and as he says in it that it was just possible he might be with us before we had finished reading it, I must needs be foolish enough to go down to the station, and dawdle about there, on the chance of his coming till it was too late to go to the bank. So, after carrying my money all that way, I had the pleasure of carrying it back again. Anne, my love, can you lock this pocket-book up for me in your desk for to-night? I will take it in the first thing to-morrow.'

Anne took the pocket-book readily enough, but instead of stirring, turned to Eleanor with a faint smile, and handed it to her with her keys. 'I feel as if I had not courage to move, now I am easier. My desk is in the next room. Will you do it for me?'

'No hurry, Mrs Mornay,' said Mr Clavering, 'no hurry. After you have made the tea will be time enough, for here comes Adam with the urn. That reminds me—Adam! what did that doubtful-looking fellow want that I saw you talking to at the Lion?'

The question was abruptly put which might account for the man's start; he stumbled with the urn and Mrs Mornay had a narrow escape. As it was, a cup was the only sufferer, Adam's strength and quickness saving himself and the urn just in time.

'I beg your pardon, sir. Was it the Lion, you said, sir?'

'Yes. I had to leave a newspaper at the vicarage, and saw you standing for nearly twenty minutes, talking to a fellow who looked like a jockey.'

'Oh, you mean that party, sir? Yes, it must have been full twenty minutes, sir. I had just stepped down about the oats, as you bid me, sir--and I thought I should never be rid of him.'

'What on earth did he want?'

'Well, sir, he was asking about--about the German, and how long he would stop, and where he came from and the like. Very curious about him he was indeed--very curious.'

'No friend of his, I hope? I never saw a more disreputable looking fellow in my life.'

'Nor I, sir. Not often.'

'Keep a sharp look-out, Adam, that we do not have such gentry prowling about the grounds. I heard of two robberies in the town, and the report is that a famous London burglar is lurking about here, having made the metropolis too hot to hold him. We do not want him to try his skill on Lawleigh.'

'No, sir.'

Adam moved away, with the respectful smile of a confidential domestic, and Mrs Mornay, having made the tea, followed to lock up the pocket-book in Anne's little room. She stopped him in the passage. What was the man like who spoke to you, Adam?'

'Like, ma'am? Well, I can hardly say. Darkish, with big whiskers--cut-away coat--red necktie--got up to look like a horse-dealing party, I should say, ma'am, more than anything else.'

'You do not know who he was, or where he came from?'

'I? No, indeed, ma'am, I am happy to say. I can inquire, if you wish it.'

'No, thank you--no.' She turned thoughtfully away into the little sitting-room opening into the garden, where Anne's desk usually stood; and having locked up the pocket-book, was coming out again, when she found Adam standing at the door, as if waiting for her.

'What is it?' she asked, rather surprised.

'I only thought, if you were uneasy about the strange man, ma'am, I would step into the Lion, and ask about the German, and whether he has any idle companions coming after him, if it will be any satisfaction to you.'

'Pray do not trouble yourself. It is perfectly unnecessary.'

'Oh, very good, ma'am; if you say so, of course you know best. I only thought I would mention it.'

Eleanor passed him without further remark, and returned to the hall.

'Keep those keys,' said Anne, when she offered them; 'if I am not down in time to-morrow morning, you will know where to find the money for my uncle. I mean to be very prudent and go early to bed, for now my headache is gone, I feel as if I should sleep; and perhaps it may end in my being lazy and not coming down till late.'

They were all as ready to give her indulgence in the morning, as if late rising had been the summit of human virtue; and she was sufficiently worn out to be docile, and let Nurse Moyle doctor and cosset her at her heart's content. But the cares of the house were not ended when she had withdrawn; Arthur had been suffering acutely all day, and though he had concealed it as well as he could, while the anxiety about Anne was at its heights, it made him so unwell, that Mrs Sydney and Eleanor had enough to occupy them in attending to his wants, and devising solace for his pain, till near eleven o'clock. He was as much touched by Eleanor's assiduity as she was by his patient fortitude.

'You are as good as a sister to me,' he said, when she was bidding him good night; 'when I am gone, granny will think of all this, and love you for your goodness to such a poor helpless wretch. I wish I could do something brotherly for you in return.'

'I may remind you of that wish some day.'

'Will you really look on me as a brother when you want one?'

'I never wanted one more,' she said with a deep sigh.

'Then bear in mind, I am at your command. I would not stick at a trifle to serve you—only you must not put it off too long. I hope you will sleep as well as I mean to do, after all your fatigue; though you look, I must say, as fresh as if you had done nothing.'

He might well say so, judging by the glow on her cheeks, and the quick light in her eyes. Sleep! the very word was mockery to one whose blood was dancing in her veins as hers was when she stood in her room at midnight, listening if the house was really still—if no more doors were likely to open, no more anxious feet wandering about, above or below. All was still, so still that every rustle of her dress sounded like a noise, and she found it would not add to her courage to listen any longer. She glanced from the window—the clouds were hurrying over the face of the moon, and the pale light that gleamed in the garden one moment, was obscured the



next. She gazed a few moments only, then sank on her knees, in brief, but very, very earnest prayer, the cry of the soul in the valley of gloom and peril, when every step is taken in darkness, among pitfalls and snares invisible, and the only hope is in the Guide it clings to—but cannot see. And then she put on her hat and cloak, and carefully shielded her candle with her hand, glided down-stairs.

Bruno was asleep on the rug at the bottom, and she only just escaped falling over him. He lifted his head in a very sleepy way, as if to ask if anything was the matter; but a gentle pat on the head kept him quiet, and he watched her with the philosophy of one too old to be surprised at a trifle, as she passed into Anne's sitting-room, gently closing the door after her. The key of the garden door hung on a nail near the hinges, and she had no difficulty in opening it. She left it ajar, and stepped out into the garden. Once there, impatience conquered fear and caution; she hurried on without pausing to listen, regardless of the chill dews that beat upon the lilac bushes and evergreens, stumbling in the uncertain light more than once, but never relaxing her speed till she was in the shrubby walk, nearest to the field where the school feast had been held. There she stopped and was looking anxiously right and left, trying in vain to penetrate the deep shadows that baffled her vision, when the bushes were cautiously drawn aside, and the German emerged into the moonlight. He stopped one moment, pulled off his wig and beard, and the next she was clasped in the arms of her husband.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE WIFE'S SECRET.

THE peril that surrounded them, even at such a moment, constrained them to exercise self-control, and that first passionate embrace was given almost in silence—only broken by the low rapid whispers of endearment, tenderness, and joy, that could reach no human ear but that to which they were breathed. Clinging round his neck with both hands as if she could not otherwise realize he was there, with her head resting

on his bosom, all she had suffered seemed nothing to Eleanor now : she felt, she understood nothing, but that he was returned—that she had regained him—and that he loved her. The past was as if it had never been—he was here, and he was her own, and whatever he came to tell her, whatever might lie in the unrevealed future, she was strong enough to brave, so long as they braved it together. ‘My love! my own! come back to me at last!’ she repeated several times, as she raised her head from his bosom to look into his face, and convince herself it was not a cruel dream. ‘You will not leave me again—you are come to tell me so!’

‘I am come to tell you a great deal, my Eleanor, that cannot be said in a moment, or here. Come a few steps farther; there is a seat this way.’ He hurried her on as he spoke, till they reached a wooden summer-house, where Arthur was in the habit of being wheeled on warm afternoons. Here Atterbury seated his wife, and then without relinquishing his clasp, knelt on the ground at her feet.

‘Forgive me, Eleanor—say you forgive me!’

‘My own, my dearest—can you doubt me?’ she returned; ‘you said you would trust me, and I tried to deserve your trust. You thought you were doing for the best, I know, and your own sufferings must have been greater than mine. You are come back, and I ask nothing more, only that you do not leave me again.’

He made no reply but his head rested against her, while his arms encircled her as he knelt. Her hand caressed his cheek, and found it wet with his tears.

‘Let them be,’ he said, in broken accents; ‘they do me good. I have been leading the life of a dog so long, this comfort makes a woman of me. My guardian angel—but for the thought of you, I should never have lived through these two years. How I have done so, seems a miracle. Men died all round me—honest men, who had names they need not hide—whose honour no one doubted—I who would have thanked death for taking me, always escaped. Either I was not worth taking, or your prayers were too strong.’

‘They were all I had left to give you,’ was her whispered reply.

‘I know it; you gave up everything for my honour. I hoped to save you from robbery by my flight; I did not know you would rob yourself—but I might have guessed it. Oh, Eleanor, how had you ever deserved so cruel a fate?’

'I have you once more ; never mind the past. God has been very merciful to us. At one time I thought I should never see you again.'

'You were very ill, then ?'

'Very ill, dearest.' She bowed her head over his as she said this, for the sorrow of that illness was more than she could speak of calmly, for a little while both were silent. But there was too much for each to ask and learn, for many of these precious minutes to be lost. Above all, she wanted to understand his present condition—why he had come back, and how he had discovered her retreat.

'My condition,' he said, 'is that of an outlaw; every man's hand is against me, and anyone who can make me his prisoner, may claim the reward—that I knew when I came. I had resolved, when I left you, not to burden you further—not to give you any opportunity of sending me money, or of following me into exile. I clung to the hope that you would thus be spared a great deal of misery, that your friends would come round you, and take you perhaps abroad, where, though I knew you could not be happy, you, at least, would live in comfort. Meanwhile, I would work hard from morning till night, till I could offer you a respectable home in America, where my name would no longer be your disgrace. This was the dream that kept me from the lowest depth of degradation and despair, for it saved me from my worst temptation, *drink*.'

'Thank God ! And you have succeeded ?'

'How could I hope to succeed ? I did hope, at first, but I found before very long, that I was watched, that some hostile influence worked against me wherever I went, and if I had a chance of getting on for a month or two, I lost it again, on my name and story becoming public. In short, Martock's agents were on my trail and followed me everywhere.'

'I feared it. Go on—you shall know why afterwards. Did you hear from him ?'

'No ; but it must have been through his people that a paragraph went round the American papers, all about my affairs, and stating that you were last heard of, in indigent circumstances, and weak health, serving in a menial capacity, and under a feigned name. Let who might, however, have spread the story, it decided my plans. I only waited till I had raised money enough for a steerage passage home. I had been lodging with some honest Germans, to whom I had shown some

little kindness, and the poor man, who was a photographer, was dying when I left, so I bought his apparatus, and got myself up as like him as I could. I believe no one would ever have known me. You did not, at any rate.'

'No, indeed. But how did you find me out?'

'I went to Shannon's office, but he was out of town on some suit of his own, and at first no one would give me any clue to your whereabouts. But at last the old clerk, to whom I confided that I was the bearer of private intelligence to you from your husband, told me you had been living, he knew, with a Mrs Cummings whose address he gave. I went down there—part of the way on foot, taking portraits occasionally to pay my way—and having inquired cautiously for you in the place, learned you were now living here. I was too well known in these parts to risk discovery. I did not know how far you might have trusted these new friends, and they were the last I could meet undisguised. But a description that I read at an inn of a birthday fête at Lawleigh, suggested to me, knowing the family weakness about the old place, to try whether a little flattery on that head would not obtain me the opportunity of privately communicating with you. I would not have done so, but I durst not do otherwise.'

'Then you have been here before? You know the Claverings?'

'I wish I could say I did not. Eleanor—is she—is Anne good to you?'

'She has been kindness itself—they all have. She suffers from depression at times, but she is so good and generous, I can bear all that.'

'Has she any idea who you are?'

'No—how should she? But I do not understand—she knows you then?'

'To her sorrow.'

'Frederick—you frighten me! I am easily frightened now. Oh, tell me the truth at once for I hardly dare to think——'

'I will. You shall know all you have to pardon. That anonymous present of yours——'

'The bracelet? I brought it here to give you—all I have left—in case you wanted money. What of it?'

'Cannot you guess who sent it to you?'

She was dumb; he could hardly hear her breathe. He tasted in that moment the fruit of what he had sown.

'Eleanor, before I knew you, I knew and loved Anne Cla-

vering; but I wronged her less than I have wronged you, for desertion was a lighter injury than marriage. It is from you who have had most to bear, that I have most hope of forgiveness. Do not turn from me—hear me one moment! Thank God the truth is spoken and you know the worst and I have nothing more to tell. I could not keep my vow to her, for I was plunged in debt, and my father would not help me unless I married a woman of fortune. Yes, you may well shudder and shrink from me; the time for pitying me is not yet come: you will by-and-by, when you think what it must be to have to own this. I saw you—and won your love—and what was to have been my punishment, became my salvation—who could be with you, and not love you, and love goodness for your sake? Miserable as I was, and as you saw me, it was as much from self-reproach at having brought wretchedness on such an angel, as all the rest of my burdens put together. That day at Twalmley, when I rested my head on your knees, oh, what would I have given to have undone the past, to have been able to make you happy, to have had a conscience at rest, even if I had bought it with a lifetime of pain? I was never so near the utter despair that drives men to suicide, as that night when I left you; and only the thought of your love and mercy saved me from that crowning sin. You know now the wretch you married—can you love and pardon him still?’

If she could, she had not yet the power of expressing it. Her brain was dizzy with the rush of recollections, the fearfully vivid light thrown on past events that had seemed so unintelligible before.

‘Miss Clavering—is it possible? Miss Clavering! And she knows now who I am—she recognised the bracelet—she has been different to me ever since—no wonder! And after all her sweet kindness, to be the one whom she could least bear to see! Oh, Frederick!’ burying her face on his shoulder, ‘tell me this, at least, if you would keep my heart from breaking—which of us is dearest to you *now*?’

‘I have deserved the question,’ said he, mournfully, ‘and the answer is worth very little. But Eleanor, if you can believe a dishonoured man, whose last wealth you are—I have only one object now to make life endurable, and that is to be more worthy of *you*. I have told you the truth at all hazards—but could I have done it, if I had not wished my whole heart to be devoted and open to you, henceforth? Listen,’ as he sat down on the bench beside her, and supported her on

his breast, 'listen, my own dear wife. You do not know what you have done for me; you have given me a motive for repentance and change of life that no one ever did. I saw what my past life had been, when I saw what you were; and if I am allowed to live, and to escape, all I ask now is to redeem it by the hardest work—anywhere, of any kind—to have a conscience at peace, and hope for pardon from Heaven. But you must help me, for I have lost your love, I dare not hope. Look Eleanor—my hands are hard with labour—of such rough kinds, too, as you have never seen—but card, or dice-box, or betting-book, or borrowed money, or a crust that was not paid for, I have not touched since I left England, and never will—so help me God, who gave me this last hold on Himself—the prayers of a wife like you!'

'I knew He would hear them—I knew it,' she said, 'and you shall never have cause to repent your openness with me—never. All is well lost, if you——' A long fit of coughing, which she vainly tried to smother interrupted the sentence, and alarmed Atterbury not a little. He drew her cloak round her, and began reproaching himself for exposing her to the night air. As soon as she could speak again she was beginning to assure him of her recovering strength, and large capacity for work and exertion, when he suddenly started up, and put his hand on her mouth. She rose too, clinging to his arm, listened as intently as he did. Steps were distinctly audible on the other side of the hedge, and as they stood perfectly still, they became aware of a figure creeping along, stopping every now and then to watch and listen, and then creeping on again under the deep shadow. Presently, there was a whistle, and then a pause, and then the figure crept on till it was quite out of sight and hearing.

'What can that mean?' muttered Atterbury.

Eleanor recollected Adam's story, and hastily repeated it. Her husband shook his head and seemed perplexed and dismayed.

'You must go in, love,' he whispered, 'go in this moment, and leave me to slip out as I came. To-morrow I will contrive another meeting, and then we will arrange——Hush!'

Footsteps were coming now from the direction of the house, and it was evident they were making for their retreat. They drew farther into the shadow, and Atterbury hastily resumed his disguise. Presently, a tall figure, with a sack on his shoulder, came into the shrubbery, looked over the hedge,

whistled cautiously, and after listening for a reply, moved towards the summer-house.

‘Pst! Are you there, mate?’

No answer being given, he hesitated a moment, and then opened a dark-lantern, and turned the light full on the interior of the little building as he advanced. The start he gave at the unexpected sight it revealed, made the sack slip from his shoulder, and the metallic jingle of plate was no more to be mistaken, than the sunburnt face of Mr Clavering’s confidential servant.

He saw in a moment that he was detected, and his whole manner became transformed. His eyes glittered with rage and hate, and his white teeth shone in the moonlight, as he stole his hand into his pocket for his large clasp-knife.

‘So this is your fidelity to your master, is it?’ said Atterbury, sternly. ‘Your accomplice is gone on, I can tell you; and if you do not carry back all those valuables you are steal-in to the place you took them from, I shall rouse the house, and give you into custody.’

‘You can speak English now, can you?’ muttered the man, with an oath; ‘If I didn’t feel sure there was some game going on, when I saw you! And Mrs Mornay out here at this time of night to meet you—I doubt her wishing you to rouse the house, and I doubt your doing it, and if you are wise, you will mind your own affairs. Keep my secret and I’ll keep yours.’

‘You think you will bully me, you rascal?’ said Atterbury, making a stride forwards. ‘Out of the way this moment—and you, Eleanor, run to the house.’

Adam set down the lantern, and planted himself in the doorway, in a menacing attitude. ‘Think twice about it, both of you. There never was a German sausage-eater yet that could frighten me.’

‘Out of the way!’ said Atterbury, beating down his guard with one hand, and seizing the collar with the other. In the struggle that ensued, the wig and beard hastily fastened on, became loosened, and fell to the ground. Adam staggered before the unexpected apparition, and his eyes flashed with exulting revenge. ‘It’s *you*, is it? Then you shall never master me alive!’ He flung Atterbury back, and unclasped his large knife. Eleanor saw it raised—the terror that had paralysed her senses gave way before that more deadly fear;

she flung herself between them with a stifled shriek, and fell insensible on the ground.

When she recovered, she was lying on the floor in Anne's little room at Lawleigh, and Atterbury was supporting her on one knee. His whispers of endearment and relief as he saw her consciousness returning, fell so sweetly on her ear, she felt at first as if in a dream, from which she feared to wake ; but as recollection returned, alarm quickened her energies ; she half raised herself on her elbow, and looked wildly round. The lantern stood on the table, and by its light she could see that Atterbury was deadly pale, and hardly able to sustain himself.

'What has happened ? How did I come here ?'

'Hush, love—ask no questions—are you better now ?'

'Quite well,' she returned, shivering, 'only giddy I think.' Dearest, you look very ill—are you hurt ?'

'That fellow slashed my arm, that is all. When you can find me something to tie it up, I shall be all right.'

He was wounded ; all her faintness was forgotten. She staggered to her feet, and holding by the table, tried desperately to steady her nerves.

'What had I better do ? Shall I call for help ?'

'Not for your life, or I am lost. Get me a basin of water if you can, and some strips for bandages, and I will show you what to do next.'

She could only find Bruno's basin, which was placed full of fresh water in the passage every night. Bruno himself had disappeared ; Adam having taken the precaution of locking him up. There were plenty of table-napkins in Anne's room. She cut one into strips, hoping she was committing no great breach of trust and honesty, and, sick and giddy as she still was, by strenuous efforts commanded herself sufficiently to obey all her husband's directions. His coat-sleeve was so soaked with blood, it was not easy to get it off ; the gash to her eyes looked ghastly, but he assured her it was only a flesh wound, and of no consequence ; and showed her how to wash and bind it up, which she did quietly and firmly ; asking no questions till all was done, and she had slung his arm in his neckcloth. Then she ventured to breathe the question she had been dreading to ask, 'Where is that wretched man ?'

He groaned as he replied, 'I did not want to hurt him—it was his own doing—when he drew his knife, I caught hold of a stick, and after he had missed his blow, by my catching the blade on my left arm, I took care not to miss mine. He



went down like a log, and I had no time to see how much he was hurt, for I had to carry you home. Here is something that fell from his pocket. You had better take care of it, if it is part of his plunder.'

'It is Mr Clavering's pocket-book, that he saw me lock up. Oh, Frederick, all this is so terrible, and you are so much hurt—let me call down Mr Clavering, and tell him everything, and trust to his generosity.'

'In this house—appear like *this* before them, and beg their compassion? Eleanor, I would rather die.'

'My dearest, you will die if you attempt to escape now, so ill and faint as you are. Oh, what was that? Did you not hear?'

He did hear, and the sound brought the large drops to his brow. He sprang to the lantern, and closed the slide, and both stood listening to the too audible sound of feet and voices in the garden steadily approaching the house.

'They have found that fellow and are bringing him here,' whispered Atterbury, 'and they will find me here, and he knows me.'

Both knew what must be the result of the discovery at that moment. They clung to each other in momentary despair.

'He will denounce me directly, and I cannot face it yet, or *here*. I have my revolver—it shall be at their own risk if they try to take me!'

'Oh no, no—for the love of heaven—for my sake!' she pleaded, clasping him as if her hold could save him from utter ruin. 'Think of your promises, your vows of repentance, of God's mercy to us! Do not resist—better suffer wrong than do it—better anything than shed blood!'

The footsteps came up to the door; a hand tried the lock, but finding it secured, there was a murmur of voices in consultation, and then they were heard to move steadily on.

'They are gone to the other door, she whispered; 'could you escape now by this?'

'Too late—I shall be seen, and they would run me down in a minute. Eleanor, Eleanor,'—strong man as he was, he was positively trembling with his intense fear,—'can you do nothing for me? Is there nowhere that you can hide me for an hour, or will you see me dragged away like a dog before your face?'

Rupert Clavering had slept, after his long walk, unusually sound, and was dreaming, very probably, of old Australian scenes, long past away, when he gradually became aware of voices shouting under his window, and of the door-bell ringing with that peculiar effect which bells have when rung in the dead of night. He roused himself with a start, and, opening his window, asked who was there.

‘Policeman, sir!’ returned a voice that he knew well. ‘We have found your servant half-murdered; there has been an attempt to rob your house. We have brought him here but we can’t get in.’

‘I’ll be with you directly.’

Mr Clavering did not waste a moment in ejaculations or inquiries; he struck a light—glanced at his watch, and saw it was just three o’clock; dressed himself with the alertness of youth, and went very quietly to rouse Nurse Moyle. She was just awake, and listening; and having made her promise to be down directly, without disturbing the ladies, Rupert hurried to open the door.

Adam looked a pitiable object, supported in the arms of the policeman and a shepherd of Mr Maberley’s; a handkerchief had been tied on his head, but the stains showed the force of the blow he had received, and his hands and dress bore testimony to his having been engaged in deadly strife.

‘Poor fellow!’ said his master, when they had laid him on the table, and he could take his hand, ‘poor fellow! how came this about? Why did you not call for help?’

‘He says he did, sir, but no one heard him. He tells us he heard people about, so he went out to see, so they set on him—that was it, wasn’t it?’ said the policeman.

‘Yes,’ said Adam, faintly.

‘Well, well, you are a brave fellow, and you shall be rewarded. But we must see to your hurt. Here comes nurse, she will be a better surgeon than I am. I say, nurse, here is a bad business. Some burglars were prowling about the place, and Adam went out after them, and they half killed him among them. Quick light us some candles, and then come and see what you can do.’

Shocked and dismayed as Nurse Moyle was, she refrained from expressing her feelings till she had done her utmost for the patient; but when Adam’s wound had been dressed, and he had swallowed some wine-and-water, the policeman began to put further questions. The answers came slowly and re-

luctantly; but the pain the man was suffering seemed to account for that; he stated that he had been disturbed by a noise in the garden—that he had come down to see who was there—that he had found the door in Miss Clavering's sitting-room ajar—that he had gone round the premises without seeing any one, till he got to the summer-house in the shrubbery, and there he found two people, a man and a woman; the man carrying a sack of plate which he let fall on seeing him. That he had a scuffle with the man, and wounded him with his knife; but he received a blow in return, which stunned him for the time, until just before the shepherd and policeman came up.

A man and a woman? Could he swear to them? Yes, he thought he could—to the man, he was sure—as to the woman——

He stopped short with a convulsive start, as a face appeared at the door, unexpected by all present—the pale, almost haggard face of Eleanor Atterbury.

'Mrs Mornay! What made you get up? I hoped you would not hear,' said Uncle Rupert. 'I am so sorry you were disturbed.'

'Was you awake, ma'am?' asked Nurse Moyle, quickly. 'I didn't hear 'em till just as my master called, and my room is over yours.'

'I was awake,' said Eleanor. She came up to the table, and even when answering did not take her eyes off Adam, who cowered beneath them visibly.

'If you please, sir, to let me go on,' said the policeman, 'for this is serious. You could swear to the man you say?'

'Yes—I could.'

'He had no crape on, then?'

'No; he had a red wig and beard, and they fell off in the scuffle.'

'Shepherd, take my lantern, and just you run down to the spot, and look everywhere for a beard and wig. If they are found, we shall have a clue. Now then, when his beard and wig fell off, what was he like?'

Adam tried not to see Eleanor's eyes, but they fascinated him. He twisted and groaned as if with pain; and said he could only just see he had dark hair. There was a moon then, and he could see that.

'Adam,' asked Mr Clavering, 'do you believe it was the German?'

'I am sure of it, sir.'

'Did you suspect him before?'

'Yes, sir, I must say I did. He looked too knowingly got up to be real.'

The policeman turned quietly, and gave the speaker a side glance, that seemed to say, 'You are up to that, are you? Well,' he continued, aloud, 'and the woman what was she like?'

He muttered something inaudible, and complained of being faint.

'Have you any salts, Mrs Mornay?' asked Mr Clavering.

She knew where some were always kept for Arthur, and hastened to offer them. Adam held out his hand, and as it touched hers, gave her fingers an unobserved gripe, and then looked at her keenly.

'Did *you* hear them, ma'am? I was afraid you were disturbed.'

She made no answer; only became paler.

'Did you hear anything before I did, Mrs Mornay?' asked Mr Clavering.

She was still silent, and still kept her eyes on Adam.

'Don't you hear my master speaking to you, ma'am?' put in Nurse Moyle. 'And may I ask too if you have been to bed at all to-night, for it strikes me you have not.'

She was, indeed, in the dress she had worn that evening, only a close observer might have seen the skirts were torn and wet. The policeman *was* a close observer, and he noted it at once.

'I did not go to bed,' she replied, as if it was a relief to be able to answer.

'Do you think so badly of poor Arthur?' said Rupert.

'No; he seemed easier when I left him.'

At this moment the shepherd came back with the wig and beard. There could be no doubt whose they were. The policeman took them into his keeping. 'We must get out a warrant against the party, whether German or not. He cannot be far off, if he was badly wounded. My notion is, he is an old hand at this work.'

'What work?' asked Eleanor.

'Burglary, ma'am. You don't know, perhaps, that we brought a sack of plate in with us, that we picked up by the summer-house. It will be easily seen if it belongs to the family.'

The plate was brought forward and identified. It was

not what was under Adam's care, but some that had been recently bought, and was kept in a chest of which Miss Clavering had the key.

'You had my niece's keys last night, Mrs Mornay,' said Rupert. 'Did you notice if the plate-chest key was among them?'

She felt in her pocket immediately, and produced the bunch. The key was there.

'Run up, nurse, and see if the lock has been tampered with.'

'Nurse Moyle went, and returned with the news that the chest had been emptied, but the lock seemed all right.

'You did not give these keys out of your own keeping, Mrs Mornay, did you?'

'No, sir.'

'You locked up that money of mine, did you not?'

'Yes, sir,' interrupted Adam, 'I saw her do it.'

'You saw her? How came you to be there?'

'Mrs Mornay had been speaking about the party at the Lion, you know, sir, that you saw me talking to; who asked so much about the German—and I thought it would ease her mind if I stepped there to make inquiry, so I followed her to ask.'

'Were you uneasy about that person last night, Mrs Mornay?'

She made a slight sign of assent. The policeman eyed her, and then Adam, but did not seem disposed to interrupt. Nurse Moyle, who had, meanwhile, come close to the lady, now took hold of her dress. 'What ever have you been a-doing, ma'am? Here is a great piece torn out of your gown, and you are quite wet. What is this stain on your sleeve? It is blood—what have you been about?'

The policeman came up, and looked at her dress closely. 'Perhaps this belongs to you, ma'am. I picked it up on the grass.'

It was a fragment of the same material, matching exactly. She knew in a moment that she must have torn it off in her fall. A gulf seemed opening under her feet, the very sight of which made her head dizzy.

'You are quite certain sure, *now*,' said the policeman to Adam, 'that you couldn't swear to the woman you saw?'

Adam turned and looked at him, then at his master, then at Nurse Moyle; and all three followed his eyes as he slowly fixed them on Eleanor.

'I am not so sure as I was, but my head is so bad, I can't think. Oh dear, oh dear, Mr Clavering, sir, can you do nothing for this pain?'

'We must get you to bed, my poor fellow, and as soon as it is daylight, we will have the doctor. The policeman will, perhaps, be kind enough to send him.'

'I beg your pardon, sir, but I must not leave the house. Would you step this way a minute, sir—I want to speak to you.'

Rupert Clavering took up a candle, and walked with him into the next room.

'What is it? You do not surely believe——'

'Look here, sir. It is no time to mince words. It lies between them two. One or the other, or both, are concerned in this night's work, and the question is, which is to be believed most. How long has he been with you?'

'Seven years.'

'Where did you hire him?'

'Ah, poor fellow—that is not in his favour. It was on ticket-of-leave, in Australia. He was pardoned for his good conduct, and has been a capital servant.'

'Ticket-of-leave, and pardoned. And the lady?'

'She is Miss Clavering's companion and friend. We have known her partially for some months.'

'Do you know her history—where she comes from?'

'I am sorry to say I do not.'

'Then I am sorry to say, sir, I must do my duty. I must watch them both. You send them to bed, and take care they don't leave their rooms. I don't want to be uncivil, but you see I am responsible.'

'I would stake my life on her innocence. She is the sweetest, gentlest creature in the world.'

'Maybe, sir; but she may have had bad companions, for all that. They can't always help themselves, poor souls. Was any property in her keeping?'

'No; she only locked up that money for me last night. In this desk, I think.'

'Just see if it is there.'

Rupert Clavering opened the desk. The pocket-book was gone. He felt so sick he could hardly stand.

'This is ugly,' said the policeman, 'but keep all quiet. Don't frighten her—only make her go to her room, and don't let her leave it. If she is reasonable, I will be civil; and if

she will confess, so much the better ; but she must be told all she says will be made a note of. That is only fair.'

Mr Clavering had ridden for his life across a country on fire, but did not tremble then as he did now. He went first to Nurse Moyle—gave her some directions in a low voice, and then took Eleanor's hand. 'Come, Mrs Mornay, you must go to bed. Now, do not say anything more—I insist upon—I ask it as a favour. Do, I implore you, go up quietly, and promise not to leave your room till you are called.'

'I cannot, sir—I cannot go to bed. Oh, Mr Clavering!'

'Hush, hush—come here ; I want to speak to you.' He took her into the passage, and grasped her by both hands. 'You are not guilty, I know'

'Oh, God forbid ! I saw you were all suspecting me ; and yet how could you believe it ?'

'I don't—I won't—and yet, I cannot help appearances. That money, you know——'

'Here it is. I hope it is all safe.'

He took it mechanically, dismayed beyond the power of speech.

'I wouldn't believe the policeman,' he said, at last. 'Will you tell me the truth before I leave you ? I have not a moment to spare.'

'Oh, let me see Miss Clavering!'

'Anne ? No, indeed. She is too unwell. I am only anxious to prevent her being disturbed. Mrs Mornay, I would spare you anything I could, but I can do nothing, if you will not spare yourself. If you would not be in actual custody, you must go to your room, and Nurse Moyle must see that you do not leave it.'

'Oh no, sir—not till I have spoken to Miss Clavering. Oh, sir, have pity upon me—do not send me up-stairs. If I only dared to tell you all——'

The policeman opened the door into the passage, and stood quietly looking at them. 'I'm going to see your man snug in bed, sir ; and this good lady will do the same by Mrs Mornay, if agreeable to you.'

Nurse Moyle came out as he spoke, and put her hand, not unkindly, on Eleanor's shoulder.

'Come you to bed, and don't make more noise than you can help. No one is going to hurt you ; you needn't shiver like that.'

'Oh, Mrs Moyle, Mrs Moyle—for one minute, let me speak to Miss Clavering !'

'Not for your life. She is asleep, I hope, and I'll not wake her for anybody. You will see her in the morning, if she is well enough. Come now, be a sensible woman, and do as you are bid, for there is no help for it, and all this only makes it worse.'

She drew her arm in hers, and half carried her up the stairs. Eleanor offered no more resistance, but seemed incapable of exerting herself, and when in her own room, sank down on the floor with her face hidden against the bed-clothes. No entreaty could make her rise, or undress ; and Nurse Moyle was obliged to leave her, and content herself with securing the door outside.

Arthur Sydney, worn out with pain, had slept off and on, rather longer than usual. He woke between four and five, thirsty and faint, and longing for his early cup of milk ; but patiently resolved not to disturb anybody before the time ; and was wishing he could go to sleep again and forget it, when he thought he heard a sound in the next room, as if some one was moaning in pain. Mrs Mornay was his next neighbour, and, as he had often said, she never seemed to move a finger from the time she went into her room till she came out, so this was something quite new. He listened—sat up in bed—and became so convinced of the fact, he knocked with his stick against the wall.

'What's amiss ? Can I ring up anybody ?'

There was a cry in return, as of intense relief. 'Captain Sydney ! can you hear me ?'

'Not well,' he shouted—'try the door.'

There was a door between their rooms, but it was kept locked on her side, and a piece of furniture was against it on his. He heard her unfasten it, and her voice became more audible.

'Captain Sydney, can you help me ? Can you help me ?'

'What is it, my dear lady ? Are you ill ? Let me ring for assistance.'

'I am not ill, but I am almost in despair. I want to speak to Miss Clavering, and they will not let me, and I shall go mad if they keep me here. It is a case of life and death. Captain Sydney, for the sake of all you ever loved, keep your promise to me last night ; do not mind what you hear, or what they tell you, but help me to five minutes with Miss Clavering, and I shall bless you as long as I live !'



‘Why don’t you go, and speak to her in her room?’

‘They have locked me in. The house has been robbed, and they think I helped to do it.’

‘They do? then here goes;’ and he rang his bell fiercely. There was a longer delay than usual; he rang again: Nurse Moyle presently appeared, with his tumbler of new milk.

‘Put that down, nurse, and go and unlock Mrs Mornay’s door. What do you mean by treating her so?’

‘Ah, my dear, it is not my fault, and she knows it. I am sorry for her, but it must be done.’

‘You are killing her among you! She is quite ill with agitation, and she implores a word with Miss Clavering. Will you let her know, or must I?’

‘Now, Captain, do you think I am going to have her woke up, and she so ill, to?’

A bell rang at that moment.

‘There now, that was your doing, sir. You rang so loud, you startled her, poor dear. We shall have her with a headache again all day.’

‘Mrs Moyle,’ implored Eleanor, from her room, ‘are you there?’

‘Yes, ma’am.’

‘Will you take a message to Miss Clavering now?’

‘What is it, if you please?’ Nurse Moyle was beginning to relent, and to feel misgivings about the justice of her severity.

‘Will you tell her that I entreat her to come to me, as soon as possible, only for five minutes—entreat her on my knees. I know she will not refuse me.’

‘Well, Mrs Mornay, as she is awake, I will see what I can do. I will promise this, at any rate—if you will keep quiet and not worret yourself or the Captain, while I make her a cup of tea, I will take it in to her, and see how she is. If she is pretty well, I will tell her all about it, and give your message; if I find her poorly and low, I shall just coax her to go to sleep again, let who will beg and pray. Now, be satisfied with that, for I can promise nothing more.’

It seemed a long time, even to Sydney, before any sign was given of the promise being kept. Eleanor obeyed the injunction so far as not to appeal to him again, but he heard her walking up and down her room as if she could not keep still; and it put him in a fever of impatience and sympathy. He was never more thankful than when at last a light step

in the passage, and the turning of the key in the lock, announced the arrival of Miss Clavering.

Anne had awoke refreshed, her headache gone, and her spirits a little revived; and she was on the alert directly Nurse Moyle began her story. But the message, and the intimation that Mrs Mornay was suspected, excited her so much, her old friend was more alarmed than by her previous languor. She hardly spoke but dressed herself in haste, and went straight to the prisoner's room, as if afraid her courage would fail her if she delayed a moment to think.

Eleanor turned on her entrance, looked at her, but stood still. The agony expressed in every feature moved Anne's compassion strongly; she came up to her with her hand extended.

'You were quite right to send for me. You knew I would see you had justice.'

'It is not so much your justice I would appeal to, as your mercy. Miss Clavering, I sent for you to give you—what I refused you once.'

She held out the bracelet. Anne recoiled—the blood surging up to her temples. 'What do you mean by that?'

'I have kept my promise—I have only just discovered from whom it came—I return it to its owner.'

She put it into Anne's passive hand, and before she could stop her, had fallen on her knees at her feet.

'For Heaven's sake!' gasped Anne, trying to make her rise. 'I beseech you, Mrs Mornay—'

She looked up; their eyes met, and all was told. Anne covered her face with her hands, and leaned for support against the table.

'It was only this night,' said Eleanor, still kneeling, 'that I learned what I now know; this night, that has been such a terrible one, and may have such terrible consequences, unless you are what I believe you to be. I know how you have been wronged. I know who wronged you. I know what I must be in your eyes—and I am here at your feet, to implore your pardon—to tell you there is but one hope for us now in our utter extremity, and that hope is in *you*.'

Anne's hand dropped; she looked down at her suppliant as if alarmed for her reason. But Eleanor seized the hand now within her reach, and held it in both her own.

'Think,' she went on, 'who it is that kneels to you—think what it must be to address you thus—think what I

have suffered—what we have all suffered together—and if ever you have cherished a bitter feeling against one who injured you without knowing it, let this humble posture make some small atonement, and win your pardon for that bitter wrong, whose shadow has fallen on us both !’

‘Oh, say no more, say no more, Mrs Atterbury—you make me too unhappy. You must not kneel like this ! I will do anything for you if you will stand up !’

‘Not yet—not yet !’ she said, clinging faster, the calmness she had hitherto preserved by an effort, giving way before the pressure of her fears, ‘you have not heard all—you do not know what I am going to entrust to you—more than my life—more than my honour—he is at this moment hid in your house.’

‘What?—Who?—Your husband?’

‘Yes—behind the secret panel. He bade me meet him in the garden—you will forgive me that—I had not spoken to him for two years ; and while we were in the summer-house, Adam came there with a bag of plate, and they had a struggle when he saw he was found out, and he recognized Frederick—and wounded him with his knife, and Frederick knocked him down, and then carried me in, for I had fainted. He had lost a great deal of blood, and I had just tied up his arm, when we heard people outside, bringing Adam home, and he implored me to hide him, and I had nowhere else. And there he is, helpless and faint, dying perhaps, and I could not persuade them to let me speak to you—the only one I dared trust. They think I went to meet the German artist, and I was obliged to bear it, for fear Adam should let out whom he had seen, and they shut me up here, and I thought you would never come—and he all this while——’

And here she broke down utterly, and sank weeping on the floor.

At that sight, all those words, the spirit of bitterness fled from Anne Clavering, never to return. All her own generous self was restored in renewed vigour and warmth, as she raised the crushed sufferer from the ground, laid her, now almost exhausted, on her bed, and by tender touch and gentle words, tried to expiate the harshness that she could not bear to remember.

‘Listen to me, my poor friend,’ she said, as she bent over her, and held her hand in hers, ‘we have no time now for more than a few words, but these I *must* say. When I sent you that wedding gift, it was in an evil spirit, for which I, in

turn, ask your pardon. I thought it would be a joy to know that you would ever suffer half I had gone through. And now I would give all I have to save you. Forget how it was sent you then, as I would pray God to forgive it. Take it once more as my gift; it is to you it should belong; take it as a proof that you too can forgive, and as a pledge of the promise I solemnly make you here, that as a sister I will stand by you—as a sister I will act and think for you both; and God do so with me and mine as I deal with you!’

‘Oh, may He bless you—may He reward you—may He give you tenfold for this!’ said Eleanor, as she raised herself on the bed, and flung her arms round Anne’s neck. ‘Go, go—I trust you as I would an angel, for it is an angel’s work to rejoice in repentance, and his is as bitter as his doom!’

Anne Clavering returned the embrace, but she could trust herself to say no more. Her heart was full, and she required a moment to think, to consider what was to be done first. She stood still, after leaving the room, holding her hand to her brow, and debating in whom she had better confide first, when, to her extreme relief, Edward Wilton appeared, coming softly up-stairs with his bag in his hand, looking very much as if he had travelled all night.

‘Why, what is the matter with you all?’ he said. ‘I expected you would all be in bed, or very like it; and here is the whole house turned upside down. I came by the night train, and waited till I thought I might venture to walk over. Did I startle you?’

‘Never mind—I have no time to think of that. Dear Edward, you are always my help and comfort; you do not know how welcome you are at this moment. Come here.’

She opened Eleanor’s door; Eleanor, who was listening for every sound, sprang to meet her. ‘What is it?’

‘My cousin is arrived; you could not have a kinder or a better adviser. Will you trust him?’ And, hardly waiting for leave, she dragged Wilton in. ‘Edward, this lady is one you have often felt for—you will feel for her now. This is Mrs Atterbury. Stay’—for the colour rushed to his cheeks, as he looked from one to the other in amazement—‘we cannot wait to explain; every moment is precious; only this—that she has shown a generous trust in me, and I have promised to stand by her. Will you help me to keep the promise, and stand by us both?’

The earnestness of the one, the distress of the other, showed him that this was indeed a time for actions, not words. He hastened to assure them of his readiness and zeal to serve a lady he respected so highly as he did Mrs Atterbury; gave her hand the cordial shake which, with an Englishman, stands in the place of vow and protestation, and then obeyed Anne's eager summons outside. As soon as they were alone, she hurriedly explained the true state of the case.

He saw the peril in a moment. 'How long has he been there?'

'Some hours at least. You do not think there is danger in that?'

'Not danger exactly, but punishment enough—even for him. Let me just say that much, and I will do all a man can do to bring him off—if only for the sake of that poor young wife. Come down, and let us see if we can get into the hall.'

They went down cautiously, but a terrible disappointment awaited them. The hall was occupied already, and as they opened the door, they heard voices in eager consultation, and the well-known whine of old Bruno. Anne understood the meaning of this directly.

'Oh, Edward!' she whispered, drawing back, '*the dog has found him out!*'

They exchanged a look of consternation; for a moment, almost of despair. He held up his finger, and they stood in the doorway, unnoticed by the others, now gathered round Bruno, intently watching his movements. The policeman had been joined by his superintendent and another, and Uncle Rupert, and Thomas, and two of the maids, were all there, and all equally perplexed by the dog's excitement. He snuffed at the wall, and whined, and scratched, as if he would tear it open.

'Is there anything behind these panels, sir?' the superintendent asked Uncle Rupert; a question that made both cousins hold their breath with anxiety.

'Rather curious that you should suggest such a thing,' was the reply, 'for the fact is, I know there used to be a closet in this hall with a secret spring; but I never saw it, and could not tell you which panel it is. There was a sad story connected with it, which led to its being disused, and forgotten.'

'Well, sir, it strikes me somebody knows more about it than you do. With your leave, I should like to try if this panel can be opened.'

He rapped it with his stick as he spoke. Bruno scratched harder than ever, and set up a long howl.

'Edward,' whispered Anne, 'if they break in, he may do something mad. He is armed, and desperate. I must tell them the truth, and open the door.'

'He may fire at you by mistake.'

'I am not afraid. He will know my voice—the only one he does know here. There is no help for it now; they must see him, and the only chance is to face it boldly.'

He saw she was right, if she had only nerve to play her part. There was no time for debate; the police were examining the chimney and panelling to make sure where the attempt should be made, and they were not a little surprised when Miss Clavering stepped forward, observing with a smile that she could save them a great deal of trouble, by explaining the whole mystery. In the first place, the closet had been discovered by Mr Wilton—and in the second, she knew the gentleman who was hid in it at the present moment. Bruno was quite right—he recognised his old friend. 'Your photographer, uncle, proves to be an old acquaintance of ours, but having fallen into adversity, he came in that disguise, hoping no one would recognise him—his only object being to obtain an interview with his wife.'

'His wife? Mrs Mornay?'

'Yes. She has just told me everything. She will tell *you*, now that she is no longer terrified on his account. Uncle, this gentleman was a favourite of Uncle Henry's—he used to be constantly here—he ought to have known better than to hide himself from his friends. I am sure you will give him a kind reception, especially when you hear that in trying to save your house from robbery, he nearly lost his life.'

The police exchanged a few words, and looked significantly at Mr Clavering, who seemed too much shocked to speak.

'I see,' said Anne, turning to the superintendent, to whom she was personally known, 'you understand now, Mr Redlands, where to look for the true culprit. Adam, being discovered by this gentleman in the act of carrying off the plate, attempted first, to silence him with his knife, and then to shift his guilt on his shoulders. You will hear the full particulars later; the thing to be done now, is to release our innocent guest.'

She made a sign to Wilton who opened the door. A ghastly figure staggered out, blinded by the rush of light, and exhausted with loss of blood. He almost fell into a chair,

gasping an entreaty for water. It was brought, and Anne, motioning the others back, put it to his lips, and bathed his forehead. His eyes closed heavily, and he drew long sighs of faintness, but the air and water reviving him a little, he lifted his head, and looked at her with a mournful earnestness that nearly overcame her resolution.

'You know where you are, do you not?' she said, cheerfully, so that all might hear, while she pressed her finger on his hand in sign of caution. You 'remember this room, and old Bruno? He remembers you, at any rate,' as the dog came snuffing about his knees, 'and if he could speak, he would tell you, it was a very ungenerous thing to hide yourself from your old acquaintance in your adversity. You deserve a worse punishment even than what you have had.'

'I do, indeed, Miss Clavering,' murmured he, 'and yet it has been very heavy. Are those men waiting to take me up?'

'Are you, Mr Redlands?' she asked, turning to the superintendent with a smile; 'can we prosecute him for burglary, do you think?'

'Not exactly, Miss Clavering; I am sure I am very sorry you have been so disturbed and annoyed; but I do say, it was not a sensible thing for any gentleman to do, and might have led to very unpleasant consequences. I would advise you, sir, never to do such a thing again.'

Atterbury shuddered involuntarily. 'It was the nearest approach to being buried alive I ever thought to see. How long was I there?'

'What time did you go in, sir?'

'It was about three.'

'And it is now seven. Nigh upon four hours.'

'Only four hours! It might have been twenty for their length. But I have my own cowardice to thank. My wife begged me to trust to Mr Clavering's goodness, and—I had not the courage.'

'Sir,' said Uncle Rupert, who had not spoken till now, but who felt his hospitality appealed to here, 'any one whom my brother received, must be welcome to me—still more, when introduced by my niece. I only wish you had taken your amiable wife's advice, as you would not only have escaped all this suffering yourself, but have spared her considerable distress. I owe her a thousand apologies for having doubted her for a moment. Step this way, Redlands, will you?' He drew the superintendent aside. 'This is a strange business, certainly, but there can be no doubt as to the fact. I was wrong to

trust so much to that miserable fellow—the blame rests on me. I see now, he must have had skeleton keys, to enable him to open any lock in the house, and that man whom I told you I had seen him talking to, may have been his accomplice.’

‘Not much doubt of that, Mr Clavering, if he is the party I think he is. We are on his traces, and are pretty sure of the mark.’

‘Well, it is a weight off my mind, at any rate, that that poor lady is cleared. Try and keep all this from getting into the papers, Redlands, if you can. As to that wretched man up-stairs, we must see; I don’t wish to prosecute; and he is too ill to be questioned at present; but I shall be glad if you will let Mr Wynne know, and ask him to step up here at his leisure. Let your men have some breakfast, while we get this gentleman to bed. The quieter he is kept the better, till the surgeon comes.’

The civil superintendent made no objections; he might have his own opinion, but he kept it to himself, and having spoken to his men, who had been examining the closet with the zest of antiquarians, withdrew with them to be feasted by the servants, while they talked over the extraordinary adventure. Old Thomas, however, lingered behind the rest, peering at Atterbury with his hand over his eyes, to assist the failing vision which he had begun to doubt. No one observed him, as Mr Clavering and Edward were busy with their guest, who had sunk back in his chair, in an attitude of great dejection and languor.

‘Take heart, sir,’ said Rupert, kindly, your dangers are over, I hope; you are among friends.’

‘Am I?’ he repeated, slowly. ‘Friends here? Well, I must bear it—I deserve it all. Miss Clavering spoke the truth—I hoped not to be known—but since I am, I must accept your kindness. No, no!’ with a sudden revulsion of feeling, that for the moment restored his energy, ‘I cannot—I must not! Call those fellows back—tell them everything—let them claim the reward—anything sooner than be kindly treated here again, and feel all the time, even that old man knows the wretch that I am!’

‘Silence, sir!’ said Anne, in a tone that had instantaneous effect, ‘for your wife’s sake—your loving, devoted wife, who has been exposed this very night to disgrace and misery for yours—command yourself for a few minutes. Think of her you if would have others think of you, and let us all agree in



making her our first consideration. Come,' she went up to him, and took his arm, 'my cousin will support you, and I will show you your room. The sooner you are safely there the better. Uncle, if you will wait here for me, I will come back to you directly.'

Passively as a child, Atterbury submitted to her orders, and Rupert waited patiently for her return. He would not even question Thomas, who, shaking his head, and muttering to himself, withdrew to his own region. The interval was rather longer than she had promised, and when she came back, she flew into his arms, and hid her face. 'Uncle Rupert, dear Uncle Rupert, forgive me.'

'For what, my love? If you mean for keeping this discovery of yours a secret, do not vex yourself about it for a moment. I own I think secrets are foolish things, but it is of very little consequence. What I want to know, is about this gentleman; who is he, that he should be afraid to be known, and what was the position when you knew him before?'

'Who is he?—what was he?—what he never can be again. Uncle, forgive me, if I even seemed to be trying to deceive you; it was only to save him, as I promised to do. His wife trusted me, and I will redeem the trust, and you will be the first to bid me do it.' She clung to him as she did the first day of his arrival, and he felt how strongly she was agitated. The truth flashed upon him.

'Anne, my child—it is impossible—even *he* could not be so utterly devoid of shame——'

She lifted her face. 'Devoid of shame, did you say? Did you ever see a man more crushed by it? I never did; I hope I never shall. Oh, Uncle, we may forgive him now! You would, if you remembered him as I do, and saw how he is changed!'

'He deserves to suffer,' said Rupert sternly.

'Perhaps so; but what are we that we should judge each other? Uncle! hear me—I have something I must tell you while I can; in your arms I am strong enough for anything—even for this, which may lose me some of your love. You know how ill you thought me on your birthday: it was on that day I found out who Mrs Mornay was—found it out through a token which *he* gave me, and which, in the bitterness of my heart, I sent her the day before her marriage—the day you came home. She did not suspect I had discovered her, and I kept my secret, but an evil spirit seemed to get possession of

me, when I thought of all I had suffered through her, and that all the right in him, had passed from me for ever, and was hers, hers only—I cannot tell you how I hated her. Oh, what dreadful hours I had, when you all thought it was only my nerves and headache—and she so gentle and sweet-tempered with me all the while, that I hated myself every time I had given her a harsh word, as I did too often. And just now, when she sent for me in her sore distress, to tell me she knew all, and to throw herself and him on my mercy—when I saw her kneeling and praying to me, knowing what she knew, and yet trusting me in spite of all—I would have died to make her happy—I would now, to save and cheer them both. More, I would live to see it, and be glad in it, if God will let me. Have I not blessings enough in the love that is given me, to keep me from selfish repinings, for that which I have not? Uncle, say that you forgive me; and for my sake, help me to keep the promise I have made, to be a sister to Atterbury's wife!

He folded her tighter to his bosom; he pressed his lips on her forehead; and she knew that her petition was granted, though at the cost of a struggle very nearly as hard as her own.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### HOW MRS ATTERBURY LOST HER BRACELET.

It was not to be expected that such an event as this should not cause a sensation, not only in the village, but in the whole neighbourhood. Such strange reports were circulated, that people were constantly coming from all parts to look at the outside of the house with the secret chamber, even if they could penetrate no farther; and, in spite of Mr Clavering's endeavours, the accounts in the papers were glowing and graphic in proportion to the scantiness of the real information. The first visitor was the old Vicar, Mr Wynne, who, being a family friend, and a magistrate, was almost the only one who was welcome. His advice and support were of great consequence under the circumstances, for the police, though uniformly civil, were anything but satisfied, and kept a quiet

watch upon the house and its inmates, that deprived them of all feeling of security. Adam was, or appeared to be, to ill from his blow to be examined, and they were glad to keep him in bed, and prevent his finding out what had taken place; but after hearing the policeman's report, Mr Wynne saw it would be expedient for her own safety to take the evidence of the lady, and after talking it over with Mr Clavering, a message was sent up to request the favour of Mrs Mornay's presence. Atterbury, by whose bed she was sitting when the message was given, turned at the mention of the Vicar's name. 'Ask him to come up here.'

He came, little knowing whom he should see, for the Claverings had not felt at liberty to divulge the secret; and hardly could he believe his own eyes, when they fell on the changed face, which had been so radiant with health and animation when he saw it last. The recollection of his past conduct made even the good old man's blood boil, and he stopped short in the middle of the room, as if almost indignant at such a meeting being forced upon him.

'I do not wonder at your hesitation,' said Atterbury, after a short silence; 'you must think I am hardened indeed, if I can bear to face an old friend, and to be seen by him here. But I have no choice, and I have another to think for. Mr Wynne, this is my wife.'

The Vicar turned to Eleanor, who had risen to give him her chair, and grasped her hand with silent energy. She looked appealingly in his face, and drew him nearer the bed. 'He has suffered so much—he has so much still to suffer—do not be harsh with him!'

Mr Wynne could not resist her; he allowed himself to be seated, and addressed the wounded man gravely, but not unkindly.

'You wished me to come to you, Mr Atterbury—why?'

'Because, if my wife has to answer your questions, it was necessary you should know the whole truth. She will tell you now whatever you require to hear.'

To be allowed to tell the whole truth was all Eleanor wanted, and in as few words as she could, she put the Vicar in possession of all the facts. Atterbury explained that Adam owed him a grudge, for having detected his thefts when in his father's service, and that his principal danger now lay in his giving information of his being in

England. Even if he forebore to do so, yet if he were brought to justice, and they had to give evidence, the exposure would be equally fatal.

‘The presence of mind of Miss Clavering, saved me this morning, but nothing could do so a second time. As far as I am concerned, I have become so weary of being hunted about, I could almost take my chance; but here is one, Mr Wynne, who, innocent, from first to last has already borne more than the guilty, and if I now accept the mercy of those I have wronged, it is more for her sake than my own.’

‘No one can help feeling for Mrs Atterbury,’ said Mr Wynne, watching her as she bent over her husband in silence, raising his pillow, giving him drink, and then sitting down on the bed, that he might rest against her shoulder. All the horror of the night was past, and though her movements betrayed her fatigue, there was a quiet hopefulness in her eye and smile that told of inward peace and trust, made stronger by deliverance. The Vicar looked, and mentally resolved, that come what might, her husband must be brought off, somehow, even if he suffered for abetting it.

‘This must have been a terrible night for you, Mrs Atterbury.’

‘It was,’ she said, shivering at the remembrance. ‘I was almost in despair at one time, but I was wrong. I have always found help when it came to the worst, and I did then. And if more trouble is in store for us, we shall find it still. I am not afraid.’

Her husband gave her a look, such as she had often pined for in vain; and then whispered a few words which the Vicar could not hear. She pressed her lips on his forehead, and left them together, and Mr Wynne, taking Atterbury’s hand, invited him to look upon him as a friend.

It was one of those moments, he saw, which if seized and employed, give colouring to the whole of the future life: the sight of the kind features—the sound of the friendly voice, had filled the unhappy young man’s heart almost to overflowing; and the anguish of repentance and sorrow craved the relief of humiliation and confession. A wasted youth—an existence of self-indulgence—the miseries he had helped to cause—the deceits, the wrongs in which he had been gradually drawn to share—rolled over his spirit like an overwhelming tide, and his cry was that of the drowning, ‘Save me, or I perish!’ And with such a case no one was fitter to deal than

the inexperienced, kind-hearted counsellor into whose hands he had been thrown.

Brought up as he had been in the expectation of a large fortune, with little or no training for its management, encouraged to pass his youth, first in thoughtless pleasure, then in reckless dissipation, Atterbury had found himself, when he became a man, so burdened with debts and liabilities as to leave him helpless at the mercy of his father, and still worse, of those who held his father in their power. Of that father he could hardly bear to speak, but Mr Wynne knew enough of the facts to divine much that was left unsaid. Only by slow degrees was the terrible state of their affairs revealed to the young partner; and the more he discovered, the more fearful he grew of further revelations, and the more desperate about himself. One thing he soon decided upon—that his union with Miss Clavering was utterly impossible. He could not wed her to ruin and disgrace; and all he could hope was that by seeming to have become indifferent, he might teach her indifference too. His own happiness being wrecked, and his self-respect with it, he had at last sullenly submitted to be disposed of as his father and advisers wished; and then his punishment took a new form. He soon found what the woman was whose heart he was winning on false pretences; and the more she rose in his estimation, the more miserable he became at the fate he was bringing upon her. His voice and courage failed when he began on this topic, and it was some time before he could go on. Indeed, his whole narration was too broken and interrupted to be given literally, and the reader, who knows a good deal that the Vicar had to be told, will be satisfied with a brief summary of facts.

Mr Martock's influence over the elder Mr Atterbury had by this time become a tyranny, not the less keenly felt for his being, nominally his dearest friend, and confidential adviser. What he decided upon, was to be done at all costs, and Frederick's resistance, impetuous at first, gradually changed into an outward submission, covering the deepest resentment and hate. Night after night, during his father's last illness, as he watched by his bedside, it wrung his heart to see the terror haunting even his sleep—the agony in which he would start up to clasp his son's hand, and implore him, if he valued his peace or his blessing, not to thwart Martock's will, but to be guided by his advice in everything. 'So long as he is our

friend, we are safe—if he turn against us, we are lost!’ was the cry that rang in the young man’s ears long after the voice that uttered it was still; and it influenced him more than he was aware. The father’s death did nothing to free the son. His papers revealed nothing of the secret that had made him a slave; and the closer insight Atterbury obtained of his affairs, only showed him a deeper gulf of ruin than he had believed in before. He was soon made to understand his position. If he would, as his father had done, submit to be ruled by his tyrant, all would go well for the present; his marriage would secure him wealth, under certain conditions, and time and help would be given for the settlement of his private, and the partial retrieving of his public affairs. If, on the other hand, he yielded to the impulse that made him long to proclaim the truth at all risks, then Mr Martock would no longer have an object in keeping back what he had concealed hitherto; and Mr Atterbury must take the consequences.

We know how he decided. And the decision made, and the yoke rivetted on his neck, he gave himself up to a desperate resolve not to investigate, not to interfere, nor to know more than he could help, or what was going on in his name, and on his responsibility. While Martock and Despard, the two evil counsellors that he owed to his father, acted for him as they pleased, he accepted the part he was told was necessary that of presenting a brilliant exterior in the sight of the world; and moved among a circle of admiring and envying friends, the object of his own scarcely disguised contempt. The one link that bound him to nobler and better thoughts, that kept him from feeling himself absolutely cut off from hope, was the attachment of Eleanor Ormonde, though his remorse on account of his conduct to her and Anne Clavering, embittered even that single drop of consolation.

Such was his state when he married—not knowing at what period, distant or near, the ruin would fall on their heads, but that come it must, and one man, when he pleased, could bring it on at any moment. His deception of his wife the day that he took her from Wardenstone to Twalmley, was not from heartlessness. Having passed his word to Mr Martock that he would be in town that night, he yet shrank from the dreadful avowal to his unsuspecting bride, and desperately resolved she should know it from other sources, and he would, for the last time, give her a happy day. He did not know how dear

she had become for that moment, if his blood could have atoned for the past, he would have poured it freely ; but he could not tell her the truth.

The whole truth was not known, even to himself; and the horror with which he learned that he was accused of fraud and swindling rendering him liable to a criminal prosecution, made him listen willingly to Despard's advice, to fly; backed as it was by the hope that his absence would lighten the difficulties of his wife. How much he had been mistaken in this, we know already—and he had at last begun to realize; and it seemed almost hopeless that the devotion of a lifetime would be sufficient atonement.

It was a sad history, but told in this manner, it could not be listened to without pity; the old clergyman felt his magisterial severity melted in sorrow and regret; and versed in the human heart by long experience, he saw the deep remorse was real, the yearning for a new course sincere and humble. He hardly knew what to advise without further reflection, but he comforted and encouraged him to persevere, and promised, when he left him, to see him again the next day.

'He has sinned heavily,' he observed to Mr Clavering, as he quitted the house, 'but he has suffered for it and will suffer more yet, if we do not take care. Keep him close, for we must get him away as soon as we can. If I do wrong in furthering his escape, I must take the consequences. I cannot see that poor young lady's heart quite broken.'

'He is under my roof, sir,' returned Mr Clavering, gravely, 'and that is pledge sufficient that all I can do for him shall be done.'

The interview with Mr Wynne, though it relieved Atterbury's mind, was rather too much for his strength, and the surgeon found him in such a feverish state, that he ordered him to be kept perfectly quiet for the remainder of the day. Towards the afternoon he fell into a refreshing sleep, during which Eleanor's friends urgently entreated her to do the same, as she was even more exhausted than her husband. The little room that had been hastily prepared for him was just opposite hers, so that she would be within hearing if she were wanted; and Anne was so resolved upon it, that she made her yield, and saw her safely into bed, waiting upon her with a tender assiduity, that spoke eloquently to Eleanor's heart. It had been arranged that she should be called in the evening, so as to attend on Frederick, if necessary, in the night. 'Get all

the sleep you can,' advised Miss Clavering, or I shall not let you be disturbed. I wish you were like that wretched Adam. He has been asleep nearly all day.'

'Is that a good sign?'

'Well, the surgeon says he is going on well, but he appears not to understand or hear what is said to him. Just as well, perhaps for himself and us. Now go to sleep. Edward is a capital nurse, and while he takes care of your husband, I mean to watch over you.'

'He has given his angels charge over us,' whispered Eleanor, with a grateful smile; and Anne had not left her five minutes, before she was sleeping like a child.

She awoke, some hours later, so much refreshed, that no persuasion could prevent her rising and dressing herself, so as to resume her attendance on her patient. He was restless with pain and fever, and she would not leave him again. For the first part of the night she was kept constantly on the alert, but about one o'clock he fell into an uneasy slumber, and thence, by degrees, into more satisfactory repose. All was still in the house, and Eleanor, as she reclined in the chair by his bedside, began to feel her own eyes growing less watchful than she wished; till after two or three victories over the drowsiness, she woke up with a sudden start, almost forgetting where she was. In a moment, a strong hand was on her mouth, her wrists were grasped by another, and she found herself powerless in the gripe of Adam.

'Speak a word, or utter a sound, and I'll do for you both. he hissed in her ear; and so fierce was his gesture, so painful his grasp, she had little doubt he would keep his word. She had presence of mind enough to refrain from struggling, and to obey without resistance his menacing sign to come out of the room—thankful, even in her terror, to see him gently close the door on the unconscious sleeper. He took her into her own apartment, without releasing his hold, and having placed her in a chair, removed his hand from her mouth.

'If you speak above your breath, I shall have to stop it for you. Answer me in whispers, quick. You are his wife?'

'Yes.'

'And you chose to risk his safety, sooner than your own. Hush, I know all about it. If you had kept my secret, I might have kept yours. Now I must take care of myself. What money have you got?'

'I will give you my purse, if you will let go my hands.'



'Look sharp, then.' He released his hold, and she gave it up. 'Mighty little here. Is this all you have?'

'Yes, all.'

'You have some diamonds, then; I know more than you think for.'

'I had, but Mr Wilton took them to town to dispose of.'

'Has he given you the money?'

'Not yet. Indeed you may believe me.'

'You had best tell me the truth, I know that. Where are your trinkets?'

She gave him the key of her jewel-box. He seized the few ornaments she had left, including the bracelet, and then asked for her watch. 'You are sure you have nothing more?'

'Nothing.'

'Very well, this must do. Now ma'am, I must tell you I am going to escape by your window, for the police are on the watch, and that is my only chance; but I'm not going to leave you to rouse the house before I can get clear away, so I must secure you first. I don't want to hurt you, but this *must* be done.'

'Oh no, no Adam—not that!' she pleaded, folding her hands in earnest supplication as he approached, 'spare me that—my husband is too ill to be left—he might call me and what should I do? Listen one moment,' as he grasped her arm impatiently, 'I will not rouse any one—I will do nothing—I will only go back and sit by his bed, and tell no one till the morning—I promise you faithfully, and I would not break my promise to save my life!'

'Well,' he said, as if relenting in spite of himself, 'perhaps you would not, but it is a risk. Here'—snatching up her small clasped Bible from the table—'swear it on this, and I'll see.'

He thrust it to her lips; she kissed it reverently.

'Will that satisfy you?'

'I suppose it must,' he muttered, as he relinquished his hold; 'and now, what will you give me in return?'

'Give you? I would, but I have nothing left—nothing but this.' She put the Bible into his hands. 'Keep it in remembrance of having done a merciful action, and God forgive you all the rest!'

He shrugged his shoulders as he put the book in his pocket, muttering something about all that coming too late now.

'Oh, do not say so!' she whispered, with a sudden impulse that she could not restrain; 'you, who have been doing so well, who had such a fair prospect, whose master trusts and feels for you—it is not too late even now. Stop in time—I will do all I can for you, and so will he; even if you must suffer for a little while, better that, than give up all your hopes in this world and the next!'

'Tell your husband that,' he returned fiercely, 'and see what he will say. Come! Every moment loses me a chance. I must see you back to his room. Mind now—if he wakes, and sees me, I'll settle you both.'

He took her again by the arm, and they crossed the passage together in silence, and with noiseless steps. He opened Atterbury's door, signed to her to go in, and stood with it in his hand, watching. The sleeper had altered his position, and lay with his face towards his enemy, and his sound arm hanging down from the bed. As Eleanor approached, he moved; she stood still, her heart throbbing so that she could hardly breathe; he muttered something unintelligible, drew the clothes over his shoulder, and turned impatiently from the light. She waited a few moments, till she heard the door softly closed. She had just courage enough left to go and draw the bolt inside, and then resumed her seat by the bed, to watch and listen, and start at every sound, real or fancied—trying to be calm, to pray, to return thanks—but, in reality, able to do little more than sit shivering as if with ague, longing for the morning light, which seemed as if it would never come.

It would be impossible to describe the state of excitement and wrath into which the household of Lawleigh were thrown, when morning actually came, and they learned what had happened while they slept. The exasperation of Mr Clavering, stung by the ingratitude of his protégé, and the disgrace inflicted on his hospitality, was only to be equalled by that of the police, though theirs was more guardedly expressed. They had watched the house in turn, all night, so that the escape of the thief must have been effected with an ingenuity that considerably raised his value in professional eyes. The open window in Eleanor's room showed where he had made his exit, though it was very provoking to think how very near he must have been to the sentinel, and that if an alarm could have been given, his arrest would have been certain. Of course, when a lady was forced to swear silence, she could not

help herself ; only, it was unfortunate. Not but what Mrs Mornay did perfectly right in submitting ; in short, no one could have behaved better ; for if she had irritated him by resistance, there was no saying what he might have done. He had done quite enough, as it was, for though Eleanor commanded herself at first sufficiently to give a clear account of the whole affair, and answered all Mr Wynne's questions about her lost property with tolerable composure, her nerves had been taxed too far, and she had not been left alone with Anne more than a few minutes, before she gave way to a burst of hysterical emotion, which she had no power to stop. With difficulty she was assisted to Miss Clavering's room—her own being occupied by the police—and Anne devoted herself to the task of calming and soothing her, but in vain : the sobs brought on a violent return of the cough, and the consequence was one long dreaded—the rupture of a blood-vessel.

Fortunately, the surgeon was in the house, and had just finished dressing Atterbury's wound, so that not a moment was lost, to which she might be said, in part, to owe her life, for even with all his care and skill, it hung on a thread for some hours. Her peril did what nothing else could have done—it broke down the barrier between Atterbury and his hosts ; in his agony for his wife he forgot himself and them, and their pity for his grief, and their mutual anxiety about its object, swallowed up all other considerations. So trying to the sufferer, however, did his agitation become, that he was obliged to retire, and Mr Wynne, from time to time, paid him visits, and did his best to keep him from despair. When at last she was out of immediate danger, and had fallen into a quiet sleep, Mr Clavering went to see him, and found him alone, writing as well as he could, with his left arm in a sling, and looking wretchedly ill, and broken down. The kind-hearted man felt his heart swell with pity ; and when Atterbury, rising, stood with downcast eyes, as if conscious how unworthy he was to be in his presence, he had to clear his throat, and recollect himself, before he could begin with the reserved politeness that he considered due to both.

'Now that we may hope that Mrs Atterbury's danger is past, I am come, sir, to ask your pardon and hers, for having exposed her to such an outrage. I shall never forgive myself for not having taken proper precautions ; but I was deceived all along ; and, as you may suppose, I thought the rascal too ill to move. A description of the trinkets is in the hands of

the police, as well as your photograph of the man, and I have offered a reward for the recovery of the property, so I have every hope it may be restored. I could pardon him anything but the shock to that delicate, gentle lady ; and so could we all.'

'You are very good, sir,' said Atterbury, without raising his eyes, 'and your goodness to her—only of a piece with what she has told me—is an obligation I *can* accept, without being crushed by shame.'

'I hope so, sir, I hope so. It is impossible to know even the little we did of her, without regard and respect, and now, without the deepest sympathy and admiration. No, I shall never forgive myself—I ought to have protected her from this ; but, sir, I did not believe that man was so bad—I had given him every chance—I had such hopes of him ! Such a return is enough to harden one's heart ; and yet, where you see repentance, how can you help trusting it ? I always did, and I believe I always shall.'

Atterbury looked up with a quick flush of emotion. 'Oh, if I might but think so !' But the shame was too strong, and sinking again into his seat, he laid his head on the table, covering his face with his arm.

It was not in Rupert Clavering's nature to strike the fallen, and this man was his guest, was overwhelmed with distress, and dependent on his generosity and kindness. His distress might be well deserved—he had little doubt it was—but it was as undeniable as his remorse and humiliation, and they were pleaders he never could resist. He came up to the table, and laid his hand on Frederick's shoulder.

'Mr Atterbury, I do not pretend to be your judge ; you best know of what your conscience has to accuse you ; but if you are really a repentant man, all I can say is, God forbid that I, or any one belonging to me, should reject your repentance. From us you will hear no reproaches ; I hope you will meet with nothing but good will ; we feel for your misfortunes, and we have a great regard for your wife, and we will do our best to help both as far as you will allow us. If you are disposed to place any confidence in me, it shall not be misplaced ; I have some experience in business, and what I have is at your service.'

By a strong effort, the unhappy young man raised himself from his dejected attitude, and turned his face towards his companion. 'Mr Clavering, I do not know what you may

have heard of me—what you may have thought—but I know it must have been bad enough ; I have not a word to say against it ; only this you must try and believe, as you did of your servant—I am not utterly lost to shame, nor entirely hardened in guilt. If I am here, it is not because I have forgotten what I have done ; it is part of my punishment—the punishment I have been enduring for years. Drawn here by circumstances I could not foresee, it is now impossible for me to put the real truth from me, or to allow you to show me kindness, without offering you the one poor atonement that a man can offer, for wrong he can never repair, that of asking you, as I ask now,—will you forgive me ? ’

There was no mistaking the tone, the attitude in which this was asked ; his humiliation was deep enough to have satiated revenge, and Mr Clavering was pained to see it. He was too sincere, even in his courtesy, to imply that the wrong was light, or that the repentance needed to be transitory ; but before he was aware, he had drawn a chair by the young man’s side, and was talking to him gently, soothingly, encouragingly, giving him at least the comfort of seeing that his sorrow was accepted as real, and offering him practical advice for the future, which no one was better fitted to give. Atterbury’s reserve melted before this unlooked-for kindness, and he showed his sense of it by frankly discussing his situation.

‘ Guilty as I am,’ he said, ‘ of more than enough to deserve any punishment they please, of this particular crime with which I am charged, that of converting to my own use the deposits and securities of those parties who have offered so high a reward—I am as innocent as you are. If any such transaction took place, it was before my time. And having told you this, I must add further, that if I were guilty of all, I could not dread a trial more. If I could compound to take the penalty, and escape the horror of the investigation, I could almost do it thankfully. God help me if I have to go through it, for no one else can.’

‘ Well, uncle,’ said Edward, meeting him as he came out of the room, ‘ what do you think ? ’

‘ I think, Ned, that Mr Wynne is right, and I was wrong, as I often am. We must stand by this poor fellow now ; he has thrown himself on our mercy. I wish he was safely out of the country, but he will hear of nothing while his wife is in this state. Come, and let us consult the Vicar ; for the case is serious, and we must be careful what we are about.’

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## HOW MRS ATTERBURY RECOVERED HER BRACELET.

It was in a very small house, in the north-west of London, whose rent, though low in comparison with others in better condition, was still heavy enough to weigh seriously on a very light purse, that Mrs Tresham and her daughters had settled themselves at last, in the hope of adding to their income by taking pupils, or giving lessons. A great deal of discouragement and disappointment had been borne with a patience not quite unrewarded, for five or six little girls came regularly now to be taught as much as could be insinuated into their little unwilling brains by the exertions of Clara and Ellen; Mrs Tresham, meanwhile, with the help of one maid-servant, keeping the house in order, and providing for the wants of every one. Her two younger boys had obtained presentations to public schools through her husband's City friends; and Charles Lyle had a curacy within four or five London miles, and came to cheer them up whenever he could, with visions of all he meant to do, when that Indian chaplaincy turned up, or that capital living fell to his share, which he always intended to have, but had not decided upon yet. There was much patient endurance in the little household; a good deal of cheerfulness in general, and, at times, a good deal of anxiety. One subject of care was rarely out of their minds; and this the heaviest of all, was Herbert.

'Is not your brother dressed yet, Clara?' her mother asked one morning about this time, when, on returning to the small parlour from the kitchen, she found her daughter hovering about the deserted breakfast-table, trying to keep the tea hot, and putting cold meat temptingly ready for the late comer. 'It is nearly time for your children, and it throws everything back when the things are kept so long.'

It was a complaint that many mothers would have made sooner; but Clara knew too well how sorely her patience had been tried; and blushed as if the fault was hers.

'He will soon be down, I think; he sat up late, writing his novel, and that makes him tired in the morning, you know, mamma.'

'Yes, dear, I do; but if he would rise early, he might work

without burning so many candles, or hurting his health. I fear the novel will hardly repay the cost.'

'Don't say so to him, dear mamma ; it is his only comfort ; and I am sure it must answer, when once it is finished ; so clever as he is with his pen when he is in the vein, he must succeed. I am sure books come out every day that are not half as good.'

'Perhaps so, love—but they are finished, you see.' Mrs Tresham sighed as she said this, and was turning to leave the room, when her son lounged in, his eyes heavy, his hair and dress in disorder, and looking only half awake. He stopped her with a kiss of assumed gaiety, 'Finished, are they, mother ? Not the pickles, I hope ? How is your brew, Clara ? I want it extra strong, I can tell you, for my head aches ready to split.'

'You were late last night, then ? Did you get much done ?' asked his mother, putting his hair back from his hot forehead, as he took his seat. She could murmur to Clara, but she had no heart to do so to *him*.

'Much done ? Well, if I don't scratch it all out again, I believe I have turned a corner. It is grand work, mother, having a heroine who comes into a million of money, and pays all the hero's bills, with a stroke of her pen. I enjoy drawing cheques for enormous amounts so much, that if she has any luck, she will have to do it half a dozen times before he gives up his latch-key and repents. I say, Clara, this tea tastes—not like hay, that would be paying it too great a compliment—an old wisp of straw soaked in lukewarm water would be nearer the mark.'

'Well, Herbert, if you had come down sooner, it would have been hotter, that is all I can say. You do not deserve any, it strikes me ; for you promised yesterday——'

'I know, I know ; but it *is* a comfort to sleep. If I could, I would sleep all day. Never mind ; when the book is done, I'll make it all up. A hundred pounds will be a jolly thing, mother, from your scapegrace boy ? A hundred—a hundred and fifty at least ; and more for a second edition. Indeed, I think I shall not let it go under three hundred. It is worth double the money.'

'I dare say, dear ; but you know you are only a beginner, so do not be too sanguine. Is there much to do ?'

'Oh yes ; and I must get a stretch this morning to refresh my wits for the grand crisis : I could not hit it off last night,

and nearly put it all in the fire, in spite of the heroine's cheques. This beef is horribly tough, Clara. Couldn't you have ordered me a mouthful of something hot, with a dash of cayenne? That is what I fancy just now.'

The mother and daughter exchanged a glance of sorrowful meaning. 'My dear boy,' Mrs Tresham began, 'if you would only consider a minute—it is more than we can well afford to go on as we do, and it is in these little things —'

'There, dear mother, I know all about it. It doesn't signify; if the table were covered with *entrées*, I should grumble that you had not given me something cold. It is my way, you know. Is the *Times* come yet?'

The *Times* was one of the luxuries that was included in Herbert's way, and he justified it to himself, by studying the advertisements diligently for that situation offering liberal salary, and other advantages, which, like Charles Lyle's capital living, was to turn up some day when you were not expecting it.

'Here it is for you, and an armful of letters into the bargain,' said his sister; 'but do finish your breakfast first, for we shall really want the room presently.'

He shrugged his shoulders with impatience, and made a feint of drinking his tea in a hurry; but put down the cup half emptied to tear open one envelope after another; his face growing gloomier with each experiment. When he had looked at the last, he crammed them all into his pocket; and affecting sublime indifference to their contents, again pretended to be doing great things in the way of breakfast. Clara was, meanwhile, glancing over the paper. Her leisure moments were few and valuable, but attendance on Herbert was a duty to which many others gave way, and though he was seldom in time for the family meals, he could not bear to take his own alone. She skimmed the columns without much heeding their purport, looking off perpetually to see if her brother was progressing as he ought, and almost wishing mamma would go, as she was sure by his face he had had unpleasant news, and was longing to pour it all out. But Mrs Tresham was as quick-sighted as herself, and lingered on, in the hope that Clara's scholars would call her away, and leave her to receive the confidence that each tried to spare the other.

'Herbert! what is the name of Mr Wilton's place in the country?' asked Miss Tresham, suddenly, after studying one corner of the paper with more attention than she had given to the rest.



'Wilton has no place of his own ; Lawleigh is his uncle's. What of it ?'

'There has been a robbery there, and it seems such a curious story altogether. Shall I read it to you ?'

He nodded assent, and she read aloud accordingly, a statement, more or less correct, of the recent scenes at Lawleigh Hall, the seat of Rupert Clavering, Esq. It struck the three at once, as being a very singular affair, and the same idea came into the minds of mother and daughter at once.

'Mornay ! —was not that the name, mamma——'

'It was, I am certain.' Their heads were bent together over the paper, which lay on the table between them.

'There may be many of the same name, of course, but her husband coming in that strange way——'

'That is just what I was thinking.'

There was a short silence ; Herbert, who had listened attentively, watched them both, but said nothing. A clatter of little feet at that moment reminded Clara of her duties ; she turned reluctantly towards the door.

'Those odious brats again !' ejaculated her brother, in a tone of hasty annoyance ; 'how I do hate the sound of their tongues, and the sight of their traps all about the place ! I wish either they or I were out of it.'

Clara's eyes fell on him with an appealing expression that at times had a salutary effect, but this morning only irritated him the more. 'I do !' he repeated, 'and what is more, ten to one that my wish is fulfilled, Clara, for all your disapproving looks. Mother,' as his sister, with a patient sigh, closed the door behind her, 'mother, it is of no use to be mysterious. I know what you two have been hinting—you think you have found Mrs Atterbury.'

'It is just possible, Herbert. Poor thing ! I have often wished to know what became of her.'

'And, of course, you think, too, that this romantic visit was paid her by one you do not like to name. No wonder. But I have done breakfast, so it will not choke me—quite.'

'I can only conjecture, as you do. I should think better of him if he has really risked his own safety to see his wife. But what do you think yourself ?'

'I am afraid it is too good news to be true, said Herbert, folding up the newspaper. Mrs Tresham started a little at the tone of his voice, and laid her finger on his arm.

'Herbert, remember !'

'No need to tell me that, mother. No fear of my forgetting.'

'Remember *whose* blessing she shared with us—*whose* head was resting on her bosom when he spoke his last words—*who* forgave, and bade *you* forgive also, the wrongs he felt for us, not for himself ;—remember all this, and you will feel as we do, that Eleanor Atterbury is sacred, and none of us should so much as add a grain of sand's weight to the heavy burden she has to bear !'

The youth made no answer ; he kept his eyes on the table, but showed no symptoms of disrespectful impatience. His lips were closer set than usual, and that was all.

'Are you going out, my dear ?' she asked, presently, seeing him move to the door.

'Yes, mother. I have people to see this morning, and one or two things to do. I may not be in to dinner. By the way, can you let me have another pound or two in advance till my book is sold ? I hate having nothing in my pocket.'

She shook her head, almost smiling at the manner in which this was said, as if the sensation was peculiar to himself ; and taking out her purse, gave him half its scanty contents.

'You must not expect more, dear, for some time. I am obliged to tell you this, as every shilling is calculated upon, and we must not get into debt, you know.'

'No, mother, don't. You would never stand it. It takes a great deal of practise to hold up your head like a man, with a hundred pound weight round your neck. I do my best, but it is a failure sometimes. Don't look at me so, though, mother. I can stand anything but that. Good-bye.'

'Shall you be out all day ? and your writing——?'

'Oh, I do that best when it is all quiet ; don't be afraid—it will be all done. I get materials as I go along ; geniuses are often hardest at work when they seem most idle, you know.' He gave her a hasty kiss, and caught his hat from its peg, without stopping to look if it had been brushed to his mind—a point on which he was usually fastidious.

For some little way he walked on, with long, eager strides, but his impatience growing too strong, even for his activity, he hailed an omnibus going to the City, and jumped in. The speed of the vehicle was not proportioned to his haste, but in course of time he was deposited in one of the crowded thoroughfares, whence he diverged through sundry smaller streets, till he reached a small dingy eating-house, into which he turned

as if quite familiar with the locality, took his place in one of the boxes, and rapped with a penny on the table for the waiter. A very doubtful-looking individual answered the summons.

‘Mr Lockwood been here to day?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Run round to the office, and ask him to step here, will you?’

‘Yes, sir,’

Herbert was sufficiently well known as a liberal customer, to command ready attention to his wishes, and after about twenty minutes’ restless expectation, the person he had summoned made his appearance—a quiet, respectable-looking man, whom no one would notice as anything particular, unless they happened to remark how keen his eyes were. He touched his hat to young Tresham, and smiled good-humoured acquiescence when the latter suggested a glass of ale, more as if he knew it would please the young gentleman, than as if he cared for the refreshment itself.

‘Well sir,’ he said cheerfully, as they sat together, ‘how is the world going with you now? Any better?’

‘Badly enough, Lockwood. I shall come into the force, after all, I expect.’

‘You think so, sir? You might do better, and, no doubt you might do worse. But it is one thing to go about, and look on, out of curiosity, as a gentleman, and another to do the work. Anything particular to-day?’

‘Oh no, nothing of consequence, I dare say. Have you seen the *Times*?’ He put the paragraph about Lawleigh before his companion, who read it composedly, and nodded his head. ‘I had heard all about that,’ he said; ‘we have got the man’s photograph, and description of the trinkets. We shall have him soon, I dare say, if that is what you want.’

‘Lockwood, you remember that reward that we talked about some time ago, and which you made sure of winning, but did not?’

‘We get thrown out sometimes, sir, certainly,’ said the other, smiling. ‘No great blame to us either.’

‘I think I can show you how to get it now.’

‘Indeed, sir?’

Herbert leaned across the table, and whispered in his companion’s ear. The latter raised his eyebrows as he listened, and nodded once or twice encouragingly. ‘It is worth trying,’ he said, after a little thought, ‘if it is done at once; but we

must take care not to give any alarm. Are you known down there ? ’

‘ No ; I have been asked to go, but never screwed up my courage. I know I should be welcome at any time, but——’

‘ If you know that, sir, it will be very ungracious to stay away. Just you do as I bid you, and we’ll touch the money yet, if it is to be had in that quarter.’

‘ It is not for the money, Lockwood, I do it, though I want it badly enough. That man, or his father, or both, caused my father’s death as much as if they had shot him, and I’d drag the fellow out of Windsor Castle, sooner than let him escape again.’

‘ Quite right, sir ; but if you mean to do the job, you must keep cool, and obey orders. Otherwise, I can do nothing. Do you understand ? ’

Herbert bithis lip, but assented, and the rest of the conversation passed with their heads so close to each other, it would have been impossible for the keenest listener to overhear what was said.

When they separated, Tresham got into a cab ; a shilling or two seemed of little consequence at such a time—and went full speed to the lodgings of Charles Lyle. The curate was fortunately at home, taking his somewhat uncomfortable meal, with a book open by his plate, and a pile of papers under his hat at the other end of the table. He started up on Tresham’s entrance, nearly sending the whole of the dinner equipage on to the floor.

‘ Herbert, old fellow ! How are you ? Nothing the matter, is there ? No ? All right then. Sit down, if you can find a chair. Here, we’ll soon clear this, tilting the one most readily got hold of, so that the heap of odds and ends tumbled promiscuously upon the rug ; ‘ bring yourself to an anchor there for a minute, and have a chop—will you ? ’

The hospitality of the offer was not so apparent as it deserved ; for the said chop, uninviting as it might be, was his only chance of dinner for that day, and Charles Lyle had been racing about his parish, or exerting his lungs in his particularly noisy schools, the whole morning. Herbert declined hastily, with a hint at a late breakfast.

‘ Ah, you were at work all night, I suppose. That is not the best thing in the world for you, is it ? ’

‘ It cannot be helped, Lyle, in these times, you know. The publishers will pay for all that by-and-by. I wanted to talk to you for a minute.’

'Excuse my going on with my dinner, then, for I have an appointment in half an hour. Anything I can do?'

'Well, yes—if not inconvenient—could you lend me a five-pound note? You shall have it again in a few days.'

'I hope so, for it is the only one I have, and you know my dread of *tick*. Find it, my boy,' throwing him his port-monnaie, 'only leave me the silver, or I shall have to come on the parish for a loaf. I am sorry you are so hard up. Tell Clara I have the promise of two fresh pupils for her. I have no time to write to day. Are you going so soon?'

'Yes, thank you, my dear fellow, I have business to do. Much obliged for this,' taking the solitary note out of the purse; 'I would not ask you if it were not an urgent case. Go and see them to-morrow, if you possibly can. And if they are down-hearted about me, tell them I am sure to succeed, there's a good fellow.'

'I will, if you will set my mind at ease on one point. You are not going to do anything with that money that your mother would not approve?'

The youth grew scarlet, and clenched it in his hand.

'Charles, I cannot stand lecturing, you know that; and I won't be suspected. If you doubt me, take your money back again.'

'That is hardly gracious, Herbert: you know if there were a dozen more where that came from, you would be welcome to them all. Only it goes to my heart to see your dear mother look so careworn.'

'Do you think, then, it does not go to *mine*? I do believe you all consider me next to a brute, without feeling for a soul but myself. Don't ask me any more questions, Lyle; I am only doing what I have a right—what my father's son ought to do—but I must not speak of it before hand. Good-bye. You will know all in time.' And he hurried away, threw himself into his cab, and drove home.

Mrs Tresham was surprised, and rather vexed, when her son, bidding the Hansom wait, ran hastily into her little parlour, where she sat at work, to announce that he was going out of town for a day or two, on private business. She had never compelled him to tell her more of his proceedings than he chose, but this seemed such an unnecessary expense at that moment, that she could not but remonstrate, and entreat for some explanation. He kissed her affectionately, returning part of the money she had given him in the morning, threw

out hints about a scheme, and a sharp friend, and promise of secrecy, and contrived to restore her spirits to a more confident state. Anxious to avoid the cross-questioning of his sisters, he was very expeditious over his carpet-bag, and was gone before his mother recollected that he had given her no address, nor even said when he should return.

That night he and his friend Lockwood slept at the Lion Inn, Hadlow.

‘We must take care what we are about, sir,’ was the whispered greeting Herbert received in the morning, when he met his confederate alone. ‘There is another party here on the same errand, if I am not very much mistaken, which I may say, is not often,’

‘One of your people?’

‘Not exactly, sir. He is too old for one of us; more like a lawyer, to my thinking. He has just ordered his breakfast. If you step this way, you will see him.’

Tresham obeyed, and looking through the window of the bar into the public room, at once recognized the person in question.

‘You know him, sir?’ whispered Lockwood, as the young man stepped back.

‘Yes. He was Atterbury’s solicitor.’

‘That looks like business. Is he here for or against them, do you think?’

‘Against.’

‘Then we must decide either to take him into our counsel, or to get the start of him—that is, supposing he is here on our errand. Will he know you?’

‘I dare say he will.’

‘Then you must breakfast here, out of his way. I’ll arrange all that with the landlady. I have had a talk with her already. I shall go and have a cup of coffee along with the gentleman, and see what I can make of him.’

Herbert ate his breakfast, and waited impatiently for his ally. The latter came back to him at last, as cool and good-tempered as ever, even when reproached with being so slow.

‘He is after something, sir, that is certain, but he is one of your close ones. They are always a trouble at first. Now, the thing to be ascertained is, if the party we want is at the Hall or not; if he is not, and this one is in his secret, he will go to

the place where he is to be found ; but if this one is no wiser than ourselves, he will, most likely, go straight up to the Hall, as we should do. You see, we may be on the wrong trail after all, and if ever you mean to be one of us, Mr Tresham, you must practise patience, which, it strikes me, you forgot to put up in your carpet-bag yesterday.'

Herbert shrugged his shoulders ; but he took a rebuke from the friend of his own making better than from those whom he was expected to attend to, and professed himself as docile and cool as possible. It was, therefore, soon arranged, that he should walk leisurely, as if for his private enjoyment, to pay his call at Lawleigh, leaving his confederate to keep watch over the proceedings of Mr Martock.

'You'll do nothing, of course, without consulting me, Lockwood ?'

'Of course not, sir ; you are to get me all the information, you know. This is your job, and you will have all the credit.'

'Credit ? I doubt its reflecting much of that on either of us. Do you know, Lockwood, I have half a mind to let it alone.'

'Oh no, you have not, sir ; quite the contrary. You are going to carry it through with the same spirit and intelligence with which you begun, and here is your hat, sir, nicely brushed, and you'll go and call on your friends as if you had nothing in the world on your mind, and a great deal in your pocket. You understand.'

He made no reply, but set out as desired. Just as he had passed the vicarage gate, he met Edward Wilton, with an elderly gentleman, whom he supposed must be his uncle, and a very ungainly specimen of an uncle too.

'Why, Tresham, who would have thought of seeing you here ? Have you changed your mind, and are you come to be introduced to my uncle, after all ?'

'I hope to have that pleasure, certainly,' said Herbert, glancing at the elderly gentleman as he spoke, 'but I am not come to intrude upon him or you. I had business in the neighbourhood, so I thought I could not be so near without calling at Lawleigh.'

'I should think not. Will you go and call there now ? I wish I could go back with you, but I have business, too, this morning, and must keep my appointment. Mr Shannon—allow me to introduce Mr Herbert Tresham.' The gentlemen looked sharply at each other, and exchanged bows. 'If you

will walk on, Tresham, and send in your name, you will find Mrs Sydney and Miss Clavering at home, and I will follow as soon as I can. That is your nearest way—across the field, through the plantation.

Tresham followed his instructions, and reached the Hall without any greater adventure than meeting a policeman, lounging about—a sight that had been by no means uncommon of late. He stopped to ask his way, not because he could not find it, but in hopes of extracting something from the functionary. He learned that people were always coming down to look at the place, and they were driven wild with questions about the secret closet.

‘Is the gentleman who was shut up in it still there, do you know?’

‘I believe he is, sir. He was badly hurt, they say.’

‘A singular circumstance, is it not, that such a thing should exist, and be forgotten by the family?’

‘Well, sir it is, rather; but I heard Mr Clavering explain how that was. It seems there was an accident happened when his grandfather was a boy; a little brother of his was shut up in it by a playfellow, out of mischief, and was taken out an idiot for life; and after that, the closet was never opened, and never talked about, so it came to be almost forgotten, as you say.’

‘Ah, thank you—very interesting indeed,’ said Herbert; and he walked on, unconscious that he had set the policeman conjecturing, and that the latter watched him till he was out of sight.

The ladies received him with all the cordial kindness Edward had promised, though he could see it was a relief when he explained he was not come to stay. He was so much charmed with Miss Clavering’s personal attractions, and agreeable conversation, that he almost forgot his purpose for a time, and gave himself up to the enjoyment of the hour. Mr Clavering was out on business, but he was invited to luncheon, when he would meet him, and willingly agreed to remain. Gradually it dawned on him that time was getting on, and he had learned nothing. He led the conversation to the robbery. Miss Clavering was evidently prepared for this, and answered some of his questions readily, though briefly, while she quietly turned others aside. No hints that he could throw out led to any discovery, nor did she appear to have anything particular to conceal. It was nearly one o’clock, and he was wondering



what he should do next, when a card was brought in by Adam's successor, with the explanation that it was 'for Mrs Mornay.'

'Did you say Mrs Mornay was too unwell to receive visitors?'

'Yes, ma'am, but the gentleman said he had come on business, and he asked if Mr Shannon was here, and said he would wait to see him, if not inconvenient.'

'Ask him into the drawing-room,' said Anne, signifying by that name a small but cheerful apartment lately rescued from obscurity, and which they were furnishing by degrees. Herbert waited till the servant had withdrawn, and then came up to Miss Clavering, as she stood in silent thought, with a smile full of meaning and intelligence.

'Shall I not then have the pleasure of seeing Mrs Mornay to-day?'

'Mrs Mornay? Do you know her, then?'

'I believe I do; if she is the lady I mean, certainly; and I do not think I am mistaken.'

'Did you say you wished to see her?'

'Not if she is too unwell, and I am not even sure that I am correct. Perhaps you would be good enough to let her have my card, and if she owns my acquaintance, would kindly tell her how sorry I am to have so poor an account to take of her to my mother.'

His manner was so confident, Anne could not doubt he was in the secret, and, to satisfy her mind, went away directly. In about a quarter of an hour she returned, looking rather agitated.

'Mr Tresham, I am afraid I have done very wrong, but my friend begs to see you for a few minutes, and I dare not refuse her. Will you mind coming up-stairs with me? I need not ask you to be cautious not to excite her by too much conversation, as she has been ordered quietness, and talking brings back her cough.'

Young Tresham had not expected this; he had taken it for granted that if it was Eleanor, she would avoid seeing him; but he could find no excuse for refusal, and followed Miss Clavering, without having the least made up his mind what he should say or do.

Ever since Eleanor's attack, Anne had given her up her room, as being larger than her own, and having a small dressing-room opening into it. In this dressing-room Herbert found Mrs Atterbury, sadly changed since he saw her last, reclining

on pillows in an easy-chair—her delicate features wasted and colourless, except a hectic spot on each cheek, and her eyes looking unusually large, with the patient languor of weakness and suffering in them, which was now becoming habitual. She sat up with an effort, as the youth approached, and held out a hand, so thin and transparent, he hardly ventured to take it in his strong fingers. The touch gave him a strange thrill ; he began to wish his scheme abandoned, or that it had never begun.

‘How did you find me out?’ was her first question, asked with no little anxiety.

He murmured something about the *Times*.

‘You remember, Mrs Atterbury, my mother knew you went by the name of Mornay. She has tried very often to obtain news of you.’

‘She is very good ; I have often thought of her kindness—of your sisters’ Indeed I have. Will you sit down close to me, and then I need not speak loud.’

He complied ; his heart failing him more and more.

‘I had not courage to see them again—I should not have seen you now, only I may never have another opportunity, and I have something to tell you. I know something of your trials—forgive my naming them’—she put her hand on Herbert’s arm as she spoke ; ‘if I had not suffered too, I should not dare to do so. May I go on ?’ for his downcast, gloomy looks gave her little encouragement.

‘It is not of much use, Mrs Atterbury,’ he muttered, clenching his hand on his knee ; ‘we must bear them whatever they are.’

‘Can you forgive them, to ?’

‘Oh, of course, of course,’ and he looked at her with a smile, that made her shiver, her hands dropping on her knees. There was a short silence before she said in a feeble voice, ‘I understood that Clara—that you wished for an Indian chaplaincy for Mr Lyle ?’

‘To be sure ; he has a wretched curacy that works him to death. He would be glad of anything, but we are not likely to get it.

‘I have tried—I tell you, in case of anything happening—I wrote to my cousin, Mr Ormonde, who fills a high position in India, and has great interest, and begged him, as the only favour I should ask, that he would do what he could for your mother’s school, and get Mr Lyle made a chaplain.

I hope I shall have an answer by the return mail. One thing more,' stopping his stammered attempt at thanks; 'most fortunately just before this robbery, I had given most of my jewels to Mr Wilton to dispose of for me, and had not received the proceeds. I had reserved them, that if any pressing claim came to my knowledge, I might have some means of meeting it, however small.' She took his hand, and he felt a small packet glide into it. 'I have no right,' she added, hurriedly, 'I should not presume to make presents; I only wish to pay a very, very small part of a debt I feel heavily enough, believe me. I wish I could do more, but if you would accept this, it might enable you to buy books, or by relieving your mind of some of your anxiety, enable you to work better—or, perhaps—'

Her breath failed her here, and she sank back on her pillows, while he sat with his head down, holding the packet between his fingers, and struggling with the contending passions that she had unconsciously stirred up. Money? he wanted every farthing as if it were vital air; his mother's exhausted purse—Charles Lyle's *porte-monnaie*—those dunning letters in his pocket—he had them all before his eyes—and had he not a right to take what was acknowledged to be only his due? But then, if he took her money, could he betray her husband? and if he spared him, should he not feel he had made a merchandise of his revenge?

Again and again, as he sat there, thinking, he wished he had never come.

She watched him with increasing fear; and when he raised his eyes, he was rather dismayed to see how faint she looked. She signed to him to give her some lemonade that was on the table, and he supported her while she drank. She smiled as she thanked him.

'I have not offended you?'

'Whom *could* you offend, Mrs Atterbury?'

'Then let me see you put that in your pocket, and I shall feel sure that there is no quarrel between us.'

'You know we have no quarrel with *you*,' he said with emphasis. 'It has been a cruel shame all along, that you have been exposed to bear the brunt of all this. None but the worst of cowards would have done it. Yes,' raising his voice, in spite of her imploring gesture, 'the worst of cowards—who can shelter himself from the resentment of those he has injured, behind the helplessness and generosity of his innocent wife.'

If he were a man worthy the name, he would come forward, and face the worst, and take the penalty ; and not all my sense of what is due to your merit and misfortunes, would prevent me—*ought* to prevent me, if I had the power——’

‘From what? Herbert Tresham, from what?’ she repeated, holding him fast with both her feeble hands : ‘do you forget the last scene we shared together—the pardon, the blessing given to us both, and won on my knee, by my tears, for *him*? Do you forget what he said to you, just as his head fell back on my shoulder?—was his pardon nothing—the pardon of a dying saint, given when his heart was breaking? Must I kneel to you to renew it? I would, indeed I would—but I am so weak, so broken with all this——’

Her strength was exhausted, and the cough returning with fearful vehemence, she put her handkerchief quickly to her mouth. Tresham was horrified by the sight of blood ; he called loudly for help, so loudly that the door of bed-room was hastily opened, and Atterbury rushed in. Without noticing Herbert, he devoted himself to the sufferer, attending upon her with an assiduous care and readiness that showed he was accustomed to the office, and by his gentle, but decided manner of speaking, helping her to command herself sooner than she could have done alone. When she was once more comparatively at ease, he turned, for the first time, to look at his old friend’s son.

‘I do not blame you, Tresham, for what you said. It is all too just, and it comes from *you*. But you might have spared *her*, knowing what she is.’

‘*You* have not spared *her*, Mr Atterbury,’ said Herbert, sternly.

‘It is very true, I have not,’ and Frederick bent over his wife, and smoothed the damp hair that had fallen on her pillow, ‘but I would, if I knew how.’

Herbert stood watching him in silence. It was difficult to realize that that sunburnt, shabbily dressed man, whose manner betrayed such deep humiliation, could be the young and brilliant model that had dazzled him two years ago, and of whose patronizing notice he had then felt so proud.

‘I do not want to hurt Mrs Atterbury’s feelings,’ he said at last. ‘I am very sorry for her, as she must know. But I have others at home who have gone through as much’—he set his teeth with suppressed passion—‘and I am nearly torn to pieces with fellows bullying me for money besides—not that

I mean to take this,' flinging the packet on the table, 'but it is quite enough to drive a man to do hard things, you know——'

'What things?' said Atterbury, looking quickly round. Eleanor caught the alarm in his look and tone, and made a desperate effort to speak—to plead—to do something, she knew not what, but her head only dropped on her husband's shoulder, and he, with an imperative gesture to Tresham to be silent, lifted her as if she had been an infant, and carried her to the bed in the next room. It was some little while before he could venture to leave her, and when, on her sinking into a kind of languid torpor, he returned to the dressing-room, to learn the worst, Herbert Tresham was gone—not only from the apartment but from the house.

'It is no use, Mr Shannon. No denial or equivocation will have the slightest effect on me. I know he is here.'

'You always know more than other people, Mr Martock: more than actually happens, sometimes. You knew, for instance, that Mrs Atterbury did not wish to have any communication with me, except through you—an arrangement which led to my not communicating with her at all, as you probably foresaw; and which she has denied point blank!'

'Mrs Atterbury's denials are irrelevant at present. I speak plainly, and I will be answered plainly. I have had my eyes on both a long while, and I know they are both here now. You know, too, that every hour that young man is in England, is spent in jeopardy. In another four-and-twenty hours nothing can save him. He has no means of procuring bail, if it would be accepted; he will be in prison for months, most likely for years.'

'Pleasant news if true. But why you take the trouble of telling it, I don't see.'

'You will see plainly enough before I have done. Mrs Atterbury deceived me once; she entered into an arrangement by which my claims would have been partially satisfied, and afterwards broke it off. Those claims remain, and unless attended to, her husband is lost. Make her understand that, if you please.'

'How do you expect a poor woman to satisfy anybody's claim, when she has given up everything she has in the world?'

'She has a rich and liberal relation in India.'

'I know; Mr Ormonde. He will not be applied to, if you mean that.'

'He has been applied to.'

'He has ? By whom ?'

'By myself.'

'Upon my honour, Mr Martock—you are the most——'

'Suppose we defer epithets and comments, Mr Shannon, till the more important part of our business is over.'

'Very well ; but I warn you, Mr Martock, if they go on accumulating too long, the interest will amount to something serious.'

'I wrote to Mr Ormonde,' continued the other, without choosing to notice this remark, 'telling him of the deplorable condition in which his cousin was left, and the disgrace to which the family name might be exposed, if none of her relations came forward to shield it by liberal sacrifices. And this is his answer.'

He gave the letter to Mr Shannon. It was a short courteous reply, guardedly worded, as if the writer felt too much, and trusted too little, to dare give vent ; and purporting, that if Mrs Frederick Atterbury would herself communicate with him, and plainly state her wishes, and the sum she required, he would do his best to serve her, for her father's sake. He had already given orders to his agents to honour her draft for a handsome amount, which was stated.

'Nothing can be more gentlemanly, certainly,' was Mr Shannon's comment. 'I may give this to her of course.'

'Of course. And you will represent to her, that her husband's fate is now in her hands. If she will pledge her word that she will obtain from Mr Ormonde what I require, or even a considerable part of it—I will pledge mine that Frederick Atterbury is allowed to leave the kingdom unmolested—a pledge no one can give but myself. Do not let her flatter herself a trial will be a light matter. It will be terrible—and he knows it—even though he may not quite know why.'

'Well, it may be so ; but if I were Mr Atterbury, I should be inclined to face it, notwithstanding.'

'You would ? After what I have said ?'

'The rather that you *have* said it.'

'Then my suspicions was correct. You have those papers.'

Before any answer could be returned to this, there fell on their ears a sound that made them both start up, look at each other, and by a common impulse, rush to the door and stand listening in alarm and consternation.

Mr Clavering and Edward were just wondering at young

Tresham's strange behaviour in slipping out of the house without waiting to see them, and were debating whether to go after him or not, when they were told a person had called to speak to the gentleman and ladies about the robbery. As this might or might not be a true story, Wilton went to reconnoitre, and found an old man calling himself a jeweller, but looking more like a jew pawnbroker than anything else, who announced that an article had been offered to him for sale, which he thought must have been stolen, and had therefore detained—that, on inquiry, it seemed probable it might be one of those lately lost, and he had come to see if the lady who was robbed would identify it. On being asked to produce the article, he demurred; he would rather show it to the lady herself; as if she could describe it first, it would be more satisfactory. The lady was too unwell, Wilton told him, to be disturbed just then, and he went to consult his uncle and cousin. The old man had suggested that the lady's husband might do as well; and the question was, could Atterbury run the risk? Mr Clavering went to his room, to ask what he would do. He found him in the dressing-room, surrounded with papers and accounts, but evidently much too miserable to do anything to any purpose. Eleanor had fallen asleep, and must not be disturbed. He would come and look at the trinket; he should know it, if it were really hers. So the Jew was shown into Anne's little room, where Anne and the three gentlemen were waiting to receive him. Atterbury described his wife's watch and chain, and the little trinkets and the rings that had been taken, but the Jew shook his head. It was neither of those; he would show it to the gentleman; if he could swear to it, that would be sufficient. And he pulled out a box, in which was a gold bracelet. Was that the thing?

'Yes,' said Atterbury not daring to lift his eyes. 'I can swear to it.'

'So can I,' said Miss Clavering; 'I remember it perfectly. The calmness of her voice was some relief; he blessed her for it in his heart.'

'Is there anything by which you can identify it?' asked Mr Clavering.

The Jew looked from one to the other. They exchanged a glance—how much it said no one could tell but themselves—and then Atterbury observed, that there was a secret spring in the clasp.

And the clasp contains a picture,' added Anne. She looked

at her cousin now, and meeting his eyes bent on her, full of serious earnest inquiry, returned such an answer as he who knew her so well could alone understand and appreciate. If he had doubted of her self-conquest before the frank contrition of that look must have convinced him.

'Do you wish the clasp to be opened?' asked Rupert of the Jew. He owned it would be satisfactory; it was unfastened accordingly, and the picture recognised by all, for the likeness so skilfully painted, defied the changes of time. The evidence was all the Jew desired; he described the party who had tried to sell it to him, a description answering in all respect to that of Adam, and dwelt on his own acuteness in having at once detected his dishonesty, and compelled him to leave it by threats of the police. Before giving up the trinket to the owner, he only begged leave to speak to him alone for two minutes. The others accordingly withdrew, and Atterbury concluding the reward was in question, was beginning to assure him it was all safe, when the old man stopped him short.

'Don't you be uneasy, sir; I don't want your money at all. I am only come because it is my duty, and I am sure you will own I have done it civilly. I wish to be civil, and unless you give me reason, I shall not behave otherwise, but'—and he pulled off his white hair and his infirmities in the same moment, and his voice became decided and peremptory—'my name is Lockwood, of the detective-police, and Mr Atterbury, you are my prisoner.'

For one bitter moment—only one—the heart of the unfortunate young man swelled as if it would burst; and that moment was no small peril to his captor and himself; but the next, he had recovered his calmness, and Lockwood's practised eye saw there was nothing more to fear.

'I will go with you quietly, I give you my word,' said Atterbury; 'but tell me one thing first—how did you find out I was here?'

'Well, sir, I have been on the look-out for you a long time, but I must frankly confess I was put on the scent by a young gentleman, though he was too young to be trusted to carry the matter through.'

'You don't mean it was Tresham's doing? What am I saying? It is retribution—and it is just. You will let me consult my friends?'

'Certainly, sir; only I must keep you in sight. That is my duty.'



Frederick opened the door, and the paleness of his face told them the truth, even before they saw the transformation of the supposed jeweller. Mr Clavering, indignant at such a proceeding under his roof, was beginning to expostulate fiercely, but Atterbury begged him to forbear.

'It is only just—it must have come sooner or later. Thank you for all your kindness to me. I beg your pardon for exposing Miss Clavering to such a scene.'

'Oh, do not think of me!' said Anne—'your wife, Mr Atterbury—how shall we tell her this?'

His lips worked convulsively. 'I must see her for a minute. Officer, will you trust me? You can stand outside; but she must not see you, or it may be her death.'

'I will trust you, sir, though I must stand at the door. It is only my duty that obliges me to do it, and if you deal like a gentleman with me, I will treat you as one.'

'Thank you. Does any one know where Mr Shannon is?'

He was coming towards him at that moment, and behind him appeared a face that Frederick little expected to see; and at whose aspect he flushed so furiously, that Lockwood came a step nearer.

'You here, too? This is *your* doing, is it?'

'No, upon my honour,' said Mr Martock, earnestly; 'ask the officer—ask Mr Shannon—I had nothing whatever to do with it. On the contrary, I came to try and save you. I can save you still. Listen,' drawing him aside, 'I will get bail for you—I will pull you through altogether, if your wife agrees to my terms, and everything is put into my hands. Say the word and we are friends again—to-morrow it will be too late!'

'Mr Shannon, please to step here,' said Frederick. 'This gentleman has been proposing terms—do you recommend my taking them?'

'That depends, Mr Atterbury, on the opinion you may have of him who offers them. I have my own—but that is of less consequence.'

'If that be all, it is soon decided. Hear me, sir, for the last time—for I imagine you will hardly repeat these offers of friendship: when I was in this house before, I was comparatively an innocent man—my name was not dishonoured—my conscience had not the sufferings of others to bear. I go out of it to-day to prison—indebted to the goodness of those I have wronged for kindnesses I can never repay—and before them, I

say to you, evil genius that you have been to my father and myself—I would rather die in that prison than escape it through your advice and help ; for never yet did any one accept a service from you, that was not paid for by some innocent person's misery. What the hold was you had on him that is gone, is best known to yourself—I know what it brought him to, and never, if I can help it, shall you use such a power again. Mr Shannon—Mr Clavering—I have spoken freely before you, that you may do me the service, if necessary, of repeating to my wife what is past ; and of impressing on her mind my solemn injunction to have nothing to do with this gentleman whatever, let him threaten or promise what he will. Now Mr Lockwood, as I see you are growing impatient, if you will allow me, I will get ready to go with you.'

There was a dead silence. The officer made a civil inclination of the head, and followed him up-stairs. Mr Martock, whose face had grown the colour of lead, took up his hat, and smoothing it mechanically with his sleeve, moved to the door. No one attempted to stop him. Mr Clavering's courtesy induced him to make a stiff bow, which was barely returned, and all seemed to feel a weight off their minds when he was safely out of the house.

By this time Mrs Sydney and Arthur had learned what had happened, and the one feeling uppermost in all their minds, was first expressed by the kind old lady, 'How will that poor wife of his get over it ?' The rush of tears that came to Anne Clavering's eyes—unselfish tears, for others, not herself—were very beautiful in those of Edward Wilton. He took her aside while Uncle Rupert was consulting with Mr Shannon, and whispered a suggestion that brought a gleam of loving gratitude to her face. 'Uncle Rupert is right—there are not two men like you in the world, Edward,' was all her answer, but there was quite enough in the look and tone to make his heart bound in a manner that, at such a moment, almost seemed inhuman.

Atterbury's preparations did not take long ; he had too few things with him to give much trouble, and the courtesy of his captor was not over-taxed. The trial came when all was ready, and he had to pay his last visit to his wife. He trembled like a child as he opened the door, and the officer's pity was so far moved, that he whispered to him not to lose heart : if the magistrates would take bail, he would see her again before long.

‘Tell her, you are obliged to go up about the robbery, and if you seem to take it quietly, she will suspect nothing.’

He made no answer, but signed to him to close the door, and went softly up to her bed side. She lay in the attitude in which he had left her, sleeping so tranquilly, he stood hesitating what to do. To wake her seemed so cruel—but to leave her without one kiss, would be more cruel still. She spared him the choice by opening her eyes, and, smiling to see him bending over her, put up her hand to draw him gently down, till his face was close to hers. He could not have spoken calmly at that moment, but he folded her in a long, fervent embrace, in which all the deep remorse of his soul would fain have poured itself forth ; and then as silently released himself from her hold, and tried to leave her. Her eyes were on him, and quickened by the daily fear in which she had been living, she read that in his that made her raise herself with a start.

‘Frederick!’

The piteous cry stopped him when he had almost reached the door : his fortitude was nearly unmanned ; he stepped hastily back to the bedside, and, kneeling beside it, clasped her in his arms again.

‘Eleanor, my love—my own—I must leave you for a little while—only a little while, I hope,’ he faltered, feeling her arms cling around his neck as if death only should divide them. ‘You will help me to bear this parting, will you not ? You will be my support, as you have been before, by praying for me—you will bear up for my sake, that I may find you better when I come back, will you not ?’ he whispered again and again, terrified by her silence, and the strength of that nervous clasp of the wasted arms. But their hold relaxed even as he was speaking, and the lips and brow he kissed so despairingly, seemed growing cold beneath his touch. He sprang to his feet, almost beside himself with agony, and hardly knowing what he did, might have driven Lockwood to use severe measures, had not Anne Clavering been on the watch, and hurried in at his cry for help. She drew him gently from the bed, and took his place by Eleanor’s pillow. ‘Leave your wife to me, Mr Atterbury,’ she said, holding out her disengaged hand, the tears running down her cheeks the while, ‘trust her to me. I will guard her night and day, and comfort her if I can ; and my cousin is going up with you to London, and will not leave you while you want a friend.’

‘God reward you, was all he could reply, but he pressed

his lips on her hand, and left it moistened with his tears ; and that moment, sorrowful as it was, and realizing, as it did, the unalterable fact, that a gulf lay between them for ever, which they would not now pass if they could, was the first in which the one felt he was forgiven, and the other that she had nothing to forgive.

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

### VELLONI'S.

It was the evening of a sultry July day in Brussels, in which everybody had been expecting and longing for thunder and lightening, on the principle that when things come to the worst, they mend—that the desire for something like air and refreshment drove a crowd of residents and visitors to their favourite *café* in the Park, where, seated under the trees, with the help of an excellent band, and a liberal allowance of ices and coffee, they might hope, for a little while, to forget the glare and suffocation of the last hours. Several English parties were there, on their way to other parts of the Continent ; and among these a group with which our readers are familiar ; consisting of Mrs Cummings and Sophia, Mr and Mrs Prynne, and the Messrs Blatherwick. The Prynnes had joined the party only a day or two before, having spent the spring and early summer in travelling ; and it was still undecided where they should all go next—a fortunate circumstance for a gentleman of his temperament, as it is admitted of endless debate and a great deal of quarrelling.

‘Perfectly atrocious to think of stopping *here*!’ pronounced Mr Prynne, as, after swallowing three ices and two glasses of liqueur, he threw himself back on his chair, and gave vent to his feelings in sublime disregard of the touching sounds the first violin was drawing out at the moment. ‘The most odious place I ever saw in my life ! France without its vivacity—Germany without its taste—England without its comfort ; nothing but dust and sand and glare ; not a picture, not a church worth looking at ; and bores from sweet home coming

up to shake hands with you at the corner of every street ! I vote we start to-morrow.'

Now Mr Blatherwick senior had, perhaps, grumbled at the heat, and the fatigue of a long walk up and down the picturesque old streets, as heartily as any Briton in the whole place ; but Mr Prynne's sweeping abuse called up his love of fair play, especially as he noticed that some of the guests within hearing were listening with strong expressions of disgust. 'If people never choose to be pleased abroad, they had better go home, that is what I think. I never expected, for my part, to be without hot weather in July, and certainly, it is pleasant enough, sitting out here, if one was allowed to hear the music in peace. You would not go away without seeing Waterloo, would you, sir ?'

'I wouldn't get out of this chair to see Waterloo. I consider the old Duke was a very overrated man.'

'Indeed. Well, that alters the case.'

'Decidedly overrated. The fact is, the press made him what he was ; everybody puffed him up, and then everybody believed it, till he believed it himself. It is pretty well acknowledged now, that the Peninsular war was a blunder from beginning to end, and that Spain would much rather have kept Joseph, and would have been much better off.'

'What a pity you were not in office in those days, Mr Prynne. To be sure, we should not be enjoying your conversation now, in all probability, but for the good of unborn generations we might put up with that. Indeed, it strikes me that some of our neighbours would be happy to dispense with it as it is.'

'There, do be quiet, dear,' said the bride, impatiently. 'I want to hear this player of all things, and you are making everybody stare by talking so loud.'

A chorus of 'Hush !' in various languages, and several emphatic gestures of discontent, silenced Mr Prynne for about two minutes and a half, when he began again as if it had been only a gratifying encore.

'Not a performer worth listening to. The worst wind instruments I ever heard ; and as for that violin, Wilkie's blind fiddler was a Paganini compared with him. Your Belgians have not an idea about music ; and as for painting, I would not trust a sign-post with them !'

'I say, you will have a lantern rigged up for your special benefit, if you go on much longer,' said a voice behind him, as

a slender, well-dressed figure emerged into the light, and, lifting up his hat to the company, revealed the welcome features of young Compton. 'Do you know, Mrs Cummings,' shaking her eagerly-offered hand, 'I had only just come in when I heard Pryne's voice, and most of his lecture; and so did three tight-waisted fellows with moustaches as long as my arm, who are all very anxious to learn his name and address.'

'Oh, don't say so, Mr Compton,' said Mrs Cummings; 'it would be too dreadful to think about, only I know it is all your fun. Come and sit down and be scolded, for I am very angry with you, and do not mean, indeed, to speak to you at all.'

'What shall I do to show my penitence? I am exceedingly sorry, and won't do it again, especially as I don't know what it is. May I have some ice to keep me in spirits for my punishment? Miss Cummings, you must taste their *plombière*; it is as good as the music, and you are a judge of both. How long have you been in Brussels?'

'Only a day and a half. When did you come?'

'This morning. I have been half over Europe since that delightful evening when I last saw you.'

'What gave you such a rage for furious travelling all of a sudden?'

'Did you ever read any of those books, where people go to look for other people, and hunt out their trail, and lose it, and lose themselves, and come back on their tracks, and nose out their way again, till all of a sudden, at the end, we will say, of the third volume, they pounce on the man they want? That is just what I have been doing the last four months.'

'And have you succeeded?' asked Sophia, as usual, not half understanding him, but thinking all he said must be clever.

'Well, I have had a long run, but I am in hopes I have come up with him now. I did not expect to find *you* here.'

'So, Mr Compton!' here broke in Mr Blatherwick, leaning across the table that his voice might not disturb the company, 'you are a close hand at a secret, I find. You knew that poor Mrs Atterbury was at the grove, and never told any one.'

'How could I, sir, when I had promised I would not?'

'Ah, I am very angry with you, all the same,' said Mrs Cummings, shaking her head, but not implacably. 'You are a sad impostor, to say the least of it; and I never mean to believe you again, if you say your leg is broken.'

'Upon my honour I had the toothache—I had indeed;

only I thought it a pity it should be wasted, that was all. I wished with all my heart I might have told you the whole truth, Mrs Cummings, for I know you would have felt for a poor lady in such circumstances.'

'You only do me justice. I certainly should. Not but what I did show her every real kindness, and was a friend when she seemed to have no other. I can truly say I bear her and her wretched husband no ill will, and when he has suffered the penalty of his crimes, no one will ever hear me do otherwise than wish he may repent and amend.'

'His crimes? that is pretty strong, is it not?'

'I call robbery a crime, my dear Mr Compton.'

'Well, I am so used to be robbed, I have grown to think of it as an amiable weakness. Can they prove he was a robber?'

'I hope so, I am sure.'

'I hope not,' said Mr Blatherwick. 'Things are turning out as I said they would. I am sorry for his wife, but, for his own sake, I am glad he is taken, for I hope it will show that he was not so guilty as people think.'

'I have missed some of the papers,' said Compton, 'and I do not know all that has passed. How was he caught?'

'Did not you read the wonderful story about his being hid in a secret closet at the Claverings', and his wife being nearly taken up on suspicion of being connected with the burglars?'

'I did see that. What idiots people must be! And I heard, too, of a robbery afterwards.'

'Well,' said Mr Prynne, disturbed at having been so long left out of conversation, 'didn't you hear that a rich old parson, whom he had fleeced, came down to see the house, and got into his room on pretence of paying him a visit of consolation, and gave notice to the police, and had him taken up there and then? I only hope the old fellow will be made a bishop.'

'As usual, sir, your accuracy is of a piece with your good taste and information,' observed Mr Blatherwick, 'for I happen to know the party. It was not a clergyman, but his son.'

'It is all the same—the old gentleman put him up to it.'

'Scarcely. He died two years before.'

'He had something to do with it, then. I will bet you a bottle of Sillery he had.'

'You are safe enough there, Mr Prynne. The family were ruined by the failure, and the young man, soured by misfortune, as soon as he suspected Atterbury was the person named in the paper, went down with a detective to arrest him.'

'Well, well, it comes to the same thing.'

'Not quite, for his mother told me he had never got over it. He was so touched by Mrs Atterbury's distress, that he tried to undo what he had done, and throw the detective off the scent. But, as you may suppose, the officer was too clever for him, and while Tresham was waiting quietly at the inn, in the belief that he had sent his friend on a wild-goose chase, got into the house in disguise, and was half way to London with his prisoner, before his confederate knew what had passed. The poor boy went home in a state of distraction, that nearly threw him into a fever; and his mother has been anxious about him ever since.'

'I wish I had known all this sooner,' said Compton, musingly. 'I have been moving about so much, no one knew where to write to me, I suppose. If I had had the least idea—Ah! there he is at last!'

'Who, Mr Compton?' asked Sophia, rather vexed to see him rise to leave the party.

'My friend—so to speak—whom I have been hunting for. I thought I should meet him here. Excuse me for ten minutes, and pay particular attention to the next piece. They say it is played better here than in any town in Europe.'

He was moving as he said the words, and walked leisurely up to a table, already occupied by a tall, thin man with a blue shade over his eyes, took possession of the opposite chair, observing, 'So I have found you at last, Despard.'

'The person thus addressed lifted his head at the sound of his voice, looked at him a few moments without reply, and then stretched out his hand. 'Well, Tommy, I did not expect this pleasure, but since you say you have found me, I suppose you have thought me worth looking for, and that is something in these hard times.'

'I have been looking for you the last four months.'

'I wish I had known it. There has never been a day in the last eight, that I should not have been glad of a friend like yourself at my back. What is the matter? Do you want me to give you a character? You have only to mention it.'

'I do not want you to do me any favour that I could not return, Despard.'

'That is being too scrupulous. The fashion now is to return nothing—not even an affront; so, you see, you are safe, Tommy, if you are in a spiteful humour after your four months' chase.'



'Despard, have you any conscience left ?'

'Hush. Yes a little against a rainy day. It pays duty abroad, so one keeps it quiet. Have you run through all yours already, that you are reduced to borrow mine ?'

'No chaff just now, if you please. I am serious, I assure you.'

'And very becoming it is. Quite impressive. And you could not have chosen a more suitable spot. It is very serious work being here without money.'

'Which is your case wherever you go, I fancy, judging by the character you left behind you in most places.'

'What a comfort to have a budding Boswell like yourself, to go on one's track, gleaning up the pleasing traits of one's disposition for a future biography ! I am not ashamed of my honest poverty, Tommy. I shall be very glad if you can lend me a hundred francs to pay my hotel bill.'

'Come, Jack, I will make a bargain with you. Answer me honestly, without any nonsense, and I will not let you be uncomfortable for want of five pounds, or even ten, if necessary.'

'Take care, Tommy. If you offer too much, you will tempt me to be too accommodating with my answers. Before we begin, suppose you tell this *garçon* what you would like to have, as he is trying to catch your eye, with a perseverance worthy of the House of Commons.'

Compton ordered coffee and cognac, and then drew closer to his companion. 'I have seen Mrs Atterbury, Despard.'

'Have you ? I wish I had. How was she looking ?'

'Almost broken-hearted.'

'Then I am glad I have not. Poor thing ! Broken hearts do not kill, now-a-days.'

'No ; so to help it out, she was working on housemaid's wages, and has every appearance of going into a decline. And now, to add to all this, you see what has happened to her husband.'

Yes, I saw that. Poor Fred ! He had better have stayed with Uncle Sam.'

'Now, Despard, I have only one question to ask you ; and by your answer, I shall know whether to depend on your sincerity or not. What could induce you to make use of Mrs Atterbury's name to get that money from me ?'

Despard was silent a few minutes before he answered, 'A choice of evils, Tommy. Either I must have gone to jail, or I must have sold myself to the tempter, or I must have

taken in the innocent. I chose the latter. I knew you were a good, honest boy, in spite of your conceit; and that you would never abuse the confidence you believed that poor lady had put in you. There you have the truth, and I am afraid it is all the interest you will get for your money.'

'Well, I did think better of you than to suppose you would make a profit out of Eleanor Atterbury's misfortunes. I did think you had some feeling for her. I wish you had seen her as I did. It would haunt you to your grave, I can tell you that.'

Despard hastily swallowed the brandy that had been placed before him. 'Compton,' he said, in a low, hoarse voice, 'I can tell *you* this—her face *does* haunt me night and day; and if I could serve her, I would. I *have* served her, more than she knows; for if I had gone to Martock, instead of to you——' He stopped, as if afraid of going too far, and put his hand to his head with a quick gesture of pain. Compton asked if he was well. Well? as well as a fellow could be, who was all to pieces, racked with neuralgia, and losing his sight. 'I am not a quarter the man I was, Tommy, and that is the truth; if I were, I should be up and bestirring myself for Fred and his wife. But I have run fast, and it is the pace that kills. What is Martock about, have you heard?'

'His name does not appear at present.'

'That is a bad sign. Do you think anything would induce Eleanor Atterbury to trust me again?'

'That I cannot say. But I am sure she bears no malice, and if you can suggest anything to serve her husband, I can promise it shall be made worth your while.'

'What a keen hand you are becoming, Tommy, now you are grown serious. You say to yourself, 'Jack Despard never cares for anything but his own interest, therefore it will be better worth my while to spend a little money in getting out of him all he knows, than to argue with him on his past enormities, or even to tell him to his face he is a rogue.' I am not quite sure that you are right, remember; but, for a beginner, it does you credit. Come, I have had enough of this. Are you alone?'

'I have a party of acquaintance here.'

'Let us go and join them, then, or they will be for tearing my grey hairs out of my head. They are getting uncommonly grey, Tommy. I am going down-hill fast.'

'Don't say that—we will pull you up again; never too late

to mend, you know,' said Compton, whose good nature had already yielded to the old influence, to the rapid extinction of his resentment. He introduced Mr Despard to his friends, and they were so much charmed with the conversation, that it was agreed they should meet early the next day, and do all their sight-seeing under his guidance. Young Blatherwick, moreover, at Mr Despard's invitation, walked with him to his hotel, and stayed there, playing *écarté* till one o'clock—a circumstance which was told to Compton the next morning as a good story. He, having his own opinion on the subject, looked grave, and taking Sam apart, gave him to understand, that though his friend Despard was a gentlemanly, pleasant fellow enough, he did not recommend any one to be too intimate with him, and certainly not to try him at *écarté*, or anything in the way of play. 'For an old hand like myself, who know him, and am up to all that sort of thing, it may be all very well; but for those that come to him fresh, it is not safe. He sees sharper under that blue shade of his than most men would with a microscope.'

'Much obliged to you, Compton,' said young Blatherwick, who, already intensely disgusted by the favour shown to his rival, had no idea of being supposed to want his advice. 'If your friend is not safe company, I wonder you introduce him.'

'As to that, when I introduce one gentleman to another, I do not undertake to be responsible for either of them. You may be the sharper of the two, of course, in which case, Jack must take care of himself. I only give you warning, that though one of the pleasantest fellows living, he is a deal too clever for most people, and I think will prove so for you—and now you may do as you please.'

'Blatherwick chose to follow his own counsel, and the result may be inferred from the fact that there was a very stormy scene between him and his uncle, and that Mr Despard declined Compton's offer of money. When he was in want of it, he would remind him that he was, so to speak, in his debt—not till then. It was a comfort to have something in reserve, besides conscience, which was not always convertible. Compton saw how it was, but he could not help it; having written, at Despard's request, to beg Mr Shannon would come over as soon as possible, he chose to await his arrival, and it was evident the movements of the whole party depended on his own. Mrs Cummings professed to have taken

quite a passionate fondness, as she said, for the dear old romantic streets; she could spend hours (not that she ever stayed more than two minutes) in contemplating those grand façades in the *Grande Place*; and the pulpit in Ste Gudule was a thing to dream of—or under, as Mr Prynn would suggest in his droll way, persisting he could cut out something twice as good as all that gingerbread, with a sixpenny knife. All this enthusiasm amounted to neither more nor less than a resolve not to go away while the petted favourite of society honoured Belgium's capital with his presence; especially as she owed to him—not without a pang—that she had made the painful discovery that young Mr Blatherwick was not the young man with whom she could trust the happiness of her dear child. She could overlook a great deal, but if he could gamble away his money at cards, she should never know a moment's peace. For Mrs Cummings, it may be observed, like many other people, considered the sin of gambling to consist in losing your own money—not in winning that of other people. So they all remained together, making the best of the intense heat; and Compton, while waiting for Mr Shannon's arrival, had so little to do, that he divided the interval between wooing Sophy, and nursing Despard.

The latter had not exaggerated his infirmities; he was a mere wreck now, in body, as he had long been in spirit and soul—a last remnant of what had been strength and life, struggling against mortal decay in the one case as in the other, and, alas! with rapidly decreasing power. The young man shuddered at the double ruin, in one he had so unconsciously admired and followed; and pondered over the sermon he *saw*, as he had never done over any he heard. He was beginning to feel differently about many things. He was ashamed to think that he could ever have meant to trifle with a nice girl like Sophy, who was evidently so fond of him, and so much too good for a conceited, self-opinionated fellow like Sam Blatherwick; and he began to draw pleasant pictures in his mind, of country life and domestic cheerfulness, and long evenings at home with lots of friends and cousins always coming to stay, 'and all that sort of thing'—much jollier, after all, than the endless bother and racket of London. When once this affair of poor Fred's was done with, he really thought he should like to get married at once.

Mr Shannon arrived at last, and was received by Compton alone, with eager inquiries after Mrs Atterbury. She was

better, and begged to be warmly and gratefully remembered to him. The message made his eyes glisten, and he could not resist the temptation of dilating on the exertion she had made, the prudent things he had done, the sensible conclusions he had come to, till the lawyer cut him short with a request to see Mr Despard at once, as time was precious.

‘Don’t think him quite as bad as he makes himself appear,’ said Compton, as he went up to show him the room. ‘To hear him talk, one would suppose he had no feeling for anybody, and I really think he has for Mrs Atterbury.’

‘He has proved it,’ said Mr Shannon, shrugging his shoulders.

He had not much faith in the errand on which he had come, and had only obeyed the summons, from the conviction that no chance ought to be lost. But Despard was too much in earnest to talk to a sensible man of business as he did to Compton; he went into facts directly, and they were of a nature to rivet the attention of his hearer.

‘I always knew,’ he said, after going over sundry details for which we have no space, ‘that the old man was in Martock’s power, and trembled at the lifting of his finger; but I never got at the real reason. It was a threat hung perpetually over our heads, after his death, that something might come out which would be utter disgrace; but what that was we could only conjecture. That evening that I watched for Mrs Atterbury on Martock’s premises, I saw her stand for a moment at the window with a large packet in her hand—she seemed to hesitate a moment, and then threw it behind her, and sprang out into the garden. My curiosity was so strong, that I let her pass, knowing Compton would see her as she went out. I got in by the window she had left open, and found the packet on the floor. I had so often schemed how to get at Martock’s secrets, that I had no scruples about opening it. Spare me your comments—I have so many worse sins to answer for, this one sits lightly on my conscience.’

‘Pray, sir, go on; your conscience is not in my keeping.’

‘Some people would say you had missed a good sinecure; but we have no time to waste on old bon-mots. I opened the packet, and found so many papers and letters of old Mr Atterbury’s, dating years back, that I was obliged to abandon my first idea of searching them there, and carry them off with me—first burning the thick envelope, which I threw in the grate, and as it was half full of papers already, it raised

such a smother and smoke, I was glad to be off undiscovered. Of course he would miss the packet, and the chances were he would think it had been burnt.'

'Sagaciously judged; he did think so, and accused Mrs Atterbury of doing it. Finding her innocent, he has been trying to detect the author of the mischief ever since. The only wonder is, that he has been so quiet about it.'

'No wonder at all. When you read those letters, which I give into your keeping as evidence, you will see that he had no wish their contents should be made public. I do not believe he ever intended to do more than threaten. I do not think now, that he meant Atterbury to be brought to trial at all.'

'I agree with you there. Go on.'

'It is a sad story, and Frederick will want a great deal of courage to face it. His father was in great secret difficulty, many years ago, from an unsuccessful speculation, and saved himself by forging a deed, enabling him to dispose of a large sum belonging to his wife—all her property, in fact, that was not secured by settlement. Happily for her, she died without finding it out, but Martock, who was employed by her trustees, discovered it soon after, and, from that time, never let go his hold of the wretched man till he had drained him of money, credit, honour, and life. Read those letters, and tell me if they do not make your blood boil, old as you are; it made mine, and I am older than you—in constitution, though not in years. Over and over again was that miserable wretch forced to do things he abhorred—forced to pay sums that ruined him—forced to commit frauds that ruined others—forced even to rob his own son—it is all there, told in such piteous language, that even that son can only forgive him for his sufferings. No, Martock never meant those letters to be seen; he only held them as an instrument of terror, as you would level a gun at a mob, that, once fired, would lose its charm. Put him in the witness-box, and these papers in a sharp counsel's hands; and if he survives the operation, it will be in such a state, that none of us need trouble ourselves about punishing him further.'

'One thing more, Mr Despard. What object had you in view in keeping these things by you?'

'Sir, I am speaking as if at your confessional. Secrets are money to a man in my circumstances. I often contemplated turning this to account, but the remnant of what was once the spirit of a gentleman, somewhere about me, prevented my carrying them to market. I drew on young

Compton, that was all—and that only under severe pressure. I know I could have got money from Martock, if I had negotiated with him—but that I would not do. And now, I have only to say, there they are for you to do what you please with them. I owe Mrs Atterbury more amends than this, and if she can ever bring herself to send me a word of forgiveness, I shall feel easier, but it is more than I dare ask. If these letters help to clear her husband, perhaps she will.'

'If they do that, indeed——'

'They will go a long way towards it. All that will be brought against Frederick was done, if done at all, before he was in the firm; he never knew half that I did. And the letters throw light on many papers that puzzled us before. They are valuable in themselves, but still more so when read as a commentary. Go carefully over all that the old man left behind him—if they have escaped Martock's clutches—and then I need not teach a gentleman of your acuteness what you should do next. I wish I could help you, but my sight is going fast, like many other good things I have wasted. Tell Atterbury from me, my last advice is, to forget all the rest I ever gave him. He is young enough to begin life afresh—I am not.'

'I am sorry to hear you say so. Let me hope you are mistaken. No man with his reasoning powers still left him, need ever despair of amendment.'

'That is a mild way of putting it, but I suppose it is true, and that mine are gone; for I can no more do without play, than an opium-eater without his drug. It is become a necessary of life, and when it comes to that, you will agree with me the life is hardly worth having.'

'I am no preacher, sir,' said Mr. Shannon, gravely; 'it is not for me to teach you what you know as well as I do. You have your Bible in your hands, and while life lasts, there is hope—even for you.'

He put the papers into his pocket, retired to his own apartment, and shut himself up there for the remainder of the day. Comptom made several attempts to obtain admission, but to no purpose; and it was not till the following afternoon that he succeeded in waylaying him just as he was going out.

'Well?' he said, impatiently, linking his arm in that of the lawyer, and walking on with him uninvited, 'well? Was I right in sending for you?'

'Quite right.'

'Is he as bad as he makes himself out ?'

'I hope not, for his own sake ; and for yours, I hope you will not have much to do with him.'

'Oh, I understand him—but I am afraid that youngster you saw me talking to just now, has been rather fleeced I gave him fair warning, so it is not my fault.'

'And I give you fair warning too ; though, like most lads, you will think it a great affront. Keep away from all such friends as if they had the plague ; show him kindness, if you like ; allow him something, if you think he wants it ; but shut your ears to his precepts, and your eyes to his example. No wonder young Atterbury was ruined, with such an evil genius at his elbow'

'He has a good one to counterbalance it, sir—with such a wife.'

'She is a good, patient, loving woman, certainly ; and she has done all she could ; but they have nearly killed her among them. However, as the evil influence has had its full turn, and done its worst, we may hope now the good will have a chance.'

'When do you go back to England ?'

'To-morrow morning.'

'Then you will dine with me to-day. They give capital dinners at our hotel, and there is an old gentleman who takes a keen interest in this case, and you may find him useful.'

The dinner sounded the greater inducement of the two, and Mr Shannon allowed himself to be persuaded. On their way to the hotel, they went to a reading-room to see if there were anything new in the papers ; and were struck on entering by the evident excitement of all present, not only among the English, but the various continental readers of the Brussels daily journals. Above all other sounds, Mr Prynne's voice was distinctly audible, at its shrillest pitch, protesting it was what he had always foreseen. You never did understand how to deal with that country—every system you tried was worse than the last—you hadn't a man out there fit to meet such a crisis, nor an officer who knew half as much of his duty as a corporal in the French line ; it was all over with your credit and prestige now, and the best thing that could happen to you and the people would be, that the whole concern should fall into the hands of Russia.

'What is the matter ? Another row with China ?' cried Compton, elbowing his way through the crowd, and forcibly getting possession of the first English paper within reach.



‘Hulloa, Mr Shannon—I say, this is serious. Oh, the rascals! I wish I were in the middle of them! Look here.’

His companion looked, and read with the thrill we can remember, the fatal telegram, that gave 1857 its terrible place in England’s history. The Indian mutiny had broken out.

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## CHAPTER XXX.

### ELEEMON.

THE arrest of her husband, though an event for which her apprehension might have prepared her, fell upon Eleanor Atterbury like a crushing blow, from which it seemed doubtful whether she would ever recover. An alarming return of her former unfavourable symptoms kept her friends in the deepest anxiety, nor was she able, for many weeks, to leave her room. Anne Clavering nursed her night and day; comforted her, strengthened her, bore her up in her arms through the overwhelming tide of anguish that seemed ready to make shipwreck alike of body and mind, till the darkened faith again grasped the invisible, and the meek spirit resumed its trust in the mercy of the Judge who doeth right. Life and reason were once more spared, and she appeared again in the loving circle of which she was now considered a cherished member; but only a shadow of her former self, with that fatal consumptive delicacy of tint, justifying the warning of her medical attendant, that though, with great care, and a mild climate, she might live for some years, yet any great fatigue or excitement might carry her off with little preparation; and a winter in England would be her sentence of death. The truth was not kept from her, as it was thought right she should know the urgent necessity for calmness and resignation, and the result proved that the measure was wise. She wished, she prayed that she might live; she fought against weakness and disease; she exercised herself in hourly self-control; refrained from everything that could excite strong emotion—yielded to every restriction dictated by anxious care—and seconded every attempt to give her strength, or save her suffering, as if she had been nursing another, not herself. Her scruples about remaining at Lawleigh were quickly talked down

by her friends ; and as she was forbidden as yet to remove to London, she thankfully accepted the shelter and rest that were to build her up for the work for which she would live. They were all become attached to her, and made her their first consideration ; reverencing her grief for the living as if it had been for the dead. It was a grief that found little utterance : she could not talk about her husband in prison, or discuss the probable issue of his trial ; but she bore his shame stamped on every feature as if it had been her own. Nothing had inured her to this ; it was often as much as her courage could support at all ; and though she could think of little else, it was a burden that no one could share. Mr Clavering, however, accidentally touched on a subject that was of great use in relieving her mind. It had all along been his conviction that emigration was the only thing for Atterbury, as soon as he was released ; and he was glad to find how warmly she agreed with him. It seemed a real comfort to her to talk of the future, ignoring the fearful contingency between ; and to settle how, and when, they might sail for Australia, as soon as all this was over, just as if it were a mere consideration of time and convenience. She was never tired of listening to his directions for the voyage, his experiences in the olden days, and the changes that had come on since he first went out ; nor of his advice about climate, habits, dress, ways and means in general, management of stock, treatment of soil, and such-like, which he was delighted to give, and in giving which many an hour was spent, that led to his becoming almost as fond of her as if she had been one of his own cherished race. He never hinted what he often thought—how little she was calculated to bear the exertion of a settler's life ; the sea-voyage was to work wonders, and it became by degrees, an assumed point in the family, that she would go, as a matter of course. She accustomed herself to speak of her long journey, and even commenced such preparations as were within her reach : though they chiefly amounted to making small remembrances, for every one who had been kind to her ; and when tired of needlework, or writing, she would endeavour, as far as her feeble powers would permit, to resume the little services to which she had been accustomed. Her voice was gone, and her fingers had lost their *verve* ; but she could still bring the sounds from the instrument that were so sweet to Arthur, and which often so-laced herself when heart-sickness was too strong for fortitude. It was only sacred music she played now ; she apologised to him for the want of variety, but all other, even the melodies she

had once loved best, had lost the power to soothe or cheer. And then she heard, what English reticence would otherwise have kept back, that he had grown to feel the same, and found the music that spoke of the future more cheering than that which recalled the past. Not that he was less cheerful than before; but the eternal was hourly growing more real, as the transitory slipped from his hold, and though he would not have begun on such a subject, the pleasure it gave him to continue it led to many a peaceful half-hour, in which they strengthened each other's hands for the unknown struggle that both knew could not be far off.

Sympathy and good-will increased on all sides, as Mrs Atterbury's story became known. Mr Maberley, and other rich neighbours, sent kind inquiries, and presents of hot-house fruit; the Vicar was constant in his visits, and as the only one who could venture to talk to her of her husband, was an invaluable friend and support; letters, and offers of service, with kind reproaches for having avoided them so long, were constantly coming from friends and acquaintance; in short, if personal esteem could have comforted her, she had proofs enough—sometimes from very unexpected quarters. But, true wife that she was, one kind word about her husband out-weighed a volume about herself; and though sensible of all the kindness of this demonstration of feeling, none of it was half as precious as one of Edward Wilton's despatches to his uncle, reporting the last opinion of the lawyers, with the last news of the prisoner, and unconsciously displaying how fast the interest in him that had begun in generous compassion, was ripening into friendship and regard.

Many as had been the gifts of nature and fortune that Atterbury had lost, the power of winning hearts remained still his own. The lead he had always taken among his peers from his schoolboy days upward, was not owing to his reputed wealth, but to those personal qualities that boys and men love to look up to and follow; and which had dazzled the eyes and the judgment of Eleanor Ormonde, till her heart was too surely his for her to judge him at all. And now, in his utter destitution of all other wealth—humbled, almost crushed by his position—he won upon Wilton before either of them was aware, until there seemed some danger of Edward's forgetting his real faults, in his anxiety to see him delivered from an unjust accusation. He found himself contriving excuses and palliations for him which Atterbury never thought of making, and

wrote as earnestly to his uncle on the injustice of not taking temptations and disadvantages of early training into account, as if kind-hearted Uncle Rupert had never trusted or made allowances for anybody in his life.

‘He does not seem to care for himself; he is resigned to bear any punishment that may be considered an expiation,’ he wrote, in a letter that Eleanor soon knew by heart, ‘but he thinks of and mourns about his wife night and day; and his one hope is, that if they will allow him the chance, he may yet make her happy, and repay the kindness you have shown her. If unselfishness, humility, and earnest desire for amendment and restitution, can do anything to atone for the past, and give promise for the future, we need not despair of Frederick Atterbury, even if he has to go through a harder trial than he has realized yet.’

Mrs Atterbury was allowed to keep this letter; but another came later in the summer, that it was not thought expedient she should see. The first account of the mutiny had just been received when Wilton wrote :

‘I find Atterbury is less sanguine than the lawyers. They think he will come through; but he owns so much was done that he never half understood, that he is far from convinced they may not prove him implicated in matters of which he knows nothing. If he is condemned, he prays you and Anne to watch over his wife, until Mr Ormonde can be communicated with : he has little doubt he will make liberal arrangements on her behalf, if he does not come over to England to see after her himself. I am sorry to say on inquiring to-day at that gentleman’s agents’, they had heard a very sad report that either he, or some of his family, had fallen victims to this dreadful outbreak. I trust it may not be true, but a day or two must bring more particulars. Keep this from Mrs Atterbury till the truth is known.’

The truth was made public only too soon. Mr Ormond’s family were among the earliest victims of a fanaticism that knew no distinction of age, sex, or character; the accidental circumstance of his being away from home at the time, saved his own life—a deliverance that appeared to the childless and desolate man more of a scourge than a blessing. He was reported as seriously ill, and more than one speculation was raised among those interested in Eleanor’s fate, as to what extent she would be affected by any serious termination of his disorder.

Eleanor mourned for her slaughtered kindred, and still

more for the affliction of the generous relative to whose assistance she owed, among other things, the means of her husband's defence. The appalling details were kept from her as much as possible, but she knew enough to haunt her pillow, and so visibly affect her nerves, that her medical adviser altered his mind, and recommended change of scene, even at the cost of pure air. Change of scene to her of course meant London. If she might travel at all, she must be near Frederick till all was over, and the question of locality was still under discussion, when a letter unexpectedly arrived and brought the matter to a point. Her old hostess, Miss Craggs, having discovered her whereabouts, begged to inform her she had still some property of hers in her keeping, if she would please to say how and where it should be sent; and took the liberty at the same time, of mentioning that she had most desirable lodgings to let, in a salubrious part of London, where ladies or gentlemen could be accommodated on reasonable terms, as per advertisement enclosed. The address was very near the spot where Eleanor's heart was treasured; and she at once expressed a wish that the lodgings might be secured. She owed Miss Craggs a great deal for unbought kindness in her hour of need, as well as subsequent injury received on her account, and the situation was just what she wished—only it would not be agreeable for Anne. This last remark being what Miss Clavering never chose to attend to, was not repeated; and to Miss Craggs's salubrious lodgings they soon after removed—Anne, Eleanor, and Nurse Moyle, who by this time had acquired a despotic sway over Mrs Atterbury, as if she had been brought up in her dominions, and petted and scolded her by turns, almost as lovingly as if she had been of Clavering blood. Uncle Rupert went backwards and forwards by rail as often as he could, and Edward Wilton's leisure hours were of course devoted to them entirely. The Sydneys hoped to be in town at a friend's house during the trial; indeed, everybody who had ever been acquainted with either husband or wife, was equally determined, if possible to enjoy the excitement, which, even when your friends are in danger, is not without its charm.

There was a weary interval of waiting, through long, stifling days, before the trial began, but that was little to endure in comparison of the length of the trial itself. In their womanly ignorance, they had formed no conception of this, and the sickness, not only of hope deferred, but of fear getting the upper hand, made it a season of great suffering to all con-

cerned. We have nothing to do with the details of the proceedings ; it has not been the men that work, but the women that weep, that our story has followed all along, and it remains with them still.

All that friends and legal advisers could do for Atterbury, was zealously and skilfully done, and thanks to the light Despard had thrown, with good hopes of success ; but nothing could prevent his trial from being as sore a punishment as his utmost fortitude could endure. Repent as he might, his wrongdoing must bear its fruit, and that fruit he must gather, in all its bitterness. But there was a keener torture than this, which he had dreaded from the first—the severest that a man could stand and bear—that of hearing his father's name held up in obloquy, without the power—without the right of uttering a word in his defence. His lawyers did all they could, but facts spoke for themselves. He had foreseen it would be so, and he had to bear it, but it was an agony beyond all anticipation, and such as even the most prejudiced of his audience could not witness without respect and pity.

Mr Clavering was as much touched as his nephew by the manner in which he went through his ordeal. The shame cast on himself—the exposure to the eyes of all his acquaintance—the consciousness of being the topic of all the papers, moved him comparatively little : it was almost a satisfaction to offer this poor atonement for the sorrows he had helped to cause : but for his dead father and his living wife, his anguish was too great for fortitude or resignation. Nothing could remove the dishonour from the memory of the one—would any time be allowed him to heal the broken heart of the other ?

It was a calm autumn day—tolerably clear, even in that dim street ; and two ladies sat together in Miss Cragg's first-floor drawing-room, nominally engaged in needlework ; but in such a restless state of watchfulness, it may be doubted if half a dozen stitches were made in half an hour. These were Anne Clavering and Mrs Tresham—the only two friends whom Eleanor could bear near her at this crisis. When she first came to town, she had shrunk from seeing any one, but Mrs Tresham's urgent entreaty for admission prevailed, and when they had once met, she was never denied to her again. She seemed to cling to these two—the two to whom Atterbury had caused the deepest grief—as if she felt their pardon, their prayers, would serve him best in his need ; and if she had

sought the world over, she could not have found another two, who would have sympathized more deeply, or attended her with more loving solicitude. From the first day of the trial, Mrs Tresham never left her, except to return home at night ; and by their united care she was saved from all rude contact with the outer world, and the comparative quiet secured that was essential to her over-taxed brain. The cards that piled the table testified to the respect shown her by the world, and many kind proposals had been sent, that she should remove to the better accommodation the inviters pressed on her acceptance ; but she had declined all. And on this day, when they had reason to expect the verdict would be given, she had been unable to endure even the society of her companions ; and had silently retired to her bed-room, to pass the interval on her knees. Mrs Tresham, not being quite easy at this, followed softly. to make sure she was not ill, but came back immediately, without being observed.

‘She is praying,’ she said to Anne, in a whisper.

‘She does little else.’ was Miss Clavering’s reply, and the tears fell from the eyes of both. They sat together and waited ; speaking now and then with hushed voices, as if too near something holy for anything but reverence. Presently, there was a tap at the door. Every sound made them start, though this was only a summons Mrs Tresham was half expecting, and she went down directly to receive her son and Charles Lyle.

‘How is she, mother ?’ was Herbert’s first greeting. He looked flushed and excited, as if he could not keep still for a minute.

‘As well as we could hope. Very patient.’

‘What does she do with herself all this time ? I should go mad.’

‘So might she dear, if she was as impetuous as you. She does the only thing she can ; she trusts, and prays. Oh, how shall we tell her if our fears come true ?’

‘Look here, mother. Lyle and I are going to the court now, to get the first intelligence. If it is bad, he will bring it—he will know how—I couldn’t : if it is all right, I shall come. I want to be the one to tell her good news.’

‘My boy, I wish you would have come to see her before. She has never said a word of blame for what you did.’

‘That makes it all the worse. Never mind. If Atterbury is condemned, I shall be off—I don’t know where, and it does not much matter, but I shall never hold up my head again.

Well! we are off now, and remember if you see Lyle coming, prepare for the worst.'

'You choose him a sad office,' said his mother, as she pressed the tall curate's hand; it is just like him to accept it, but God forbid he should have it to do.'

She came up again, and sat down with Anne, as we described them just now, trying to work, but doing nothing but listen. Time passed and they were beginning to wonder whether there would really be any news at all that day, when a noise below, unusual in that house, made them both run to the top of the stairs, listen for a moment, and then hurry down.

The narrow hall seemed full of people, and Miss Craggs, who appeared to have just come in, was giving orders to one person to run to the nearest doctor, and the others to 'bring him in and lay him on the sofa.' Some one, prone and helpless, was being borne into the parlour by two gentlemen, in one of whom Anne recognised young Compton. She called him eagerly by name, and as soon as he was relieved of his charge, he flew to obey her summons.

'Don't come down you can do nothing; she knows him—she will do what is necessary till the doctor comes. I am afraid he is very bad.'

'Who is it?'

'Did you not see? It is old Martock. Mind Mrs Atterbury does not hear. It would give her a shock. How is she, Miss Clavering?'

'As well as patience can make her. Tell me what has happened?'

'Hush—come a little more this way. Did you read the account of his cross-examination?'

'Yes, of course.'

'Well, it was too much for him—no wonder. I never saw a man made such an example of, and so forced to convict himself out of his own mouth. The sensation in court was tremendous, and he took it terribly to heart—went home quite ill, and was ordered severe remedies, and to keep quiet. But no, nothing would prevent his coming to hear the end. His clerk told me this morning he had been like a madman with rage; and he persisted in saying the prisoner *must* be found guilty, and he *would* be there. He had done his best to get a verdict against him—that we all knew. He staid through the judge's summing up—heard some splendidly cutting remarks on himself, and, when the jury retired, he tried to get out



of the crowd ; some of them knew and hooted him ; and when he got into the air, he fell down in this fit. A gentleman who was waiting, as I was, to hear the result, helped me to pick him up, and Miss Craggs being there too, on the same errand, begged us to bring him to her house.'

'Yes, ma'am,' said Miss Craggs, who passed at that moment with a basin and warm water, 'it isn't that I owe him any gratitude, for I don't ; he used me downright shameful, considering that my mother was a faithful servant of his, for next to no wages, and finding herself in everything, for years and years ; and if it hadn't been for the Lord's goodness, and an old aunt's legacy last Christmas, I might have been in the workhouse now, thanks to him. But I'm a Christian, I hope, and I've no objection to be thought so, and the poor sinner shall not die for want of coals of fire on his head, if I can help it. Brandy, sir, did you ask for ? I keep no spirits in my house. I am a total abstainer from spirituous liquors in any form. If you can't keep life in without brandy, it's my belief you had better let it alone.'

There was no time to argue this knotty point, as the surgeon arrived at that moment, and the patient had to be put to bed. With great difficulty consciousness was restored, and the first word he uttered was the name of Eleanor Atterbury.

'He can't see her, poor lady,' pronounced Miss Craggs ; 'She has had enough of him in her time, and she is not equal to such a scene just now.'

The sick man turned his eyes sternly on the speaker, and with an effort that showed his mind was, for the moment, under his control, murmured, 'I must.'

'Is she here ?' asked the surgeon. 'It is very bad for him to be thwarted ;' as, indeed, the restless twitching of the clothes, and clutching of the withered hand at vacancy, too plainly showed. The strange gentleman, a dignified handsome man, in deep mourning, came forward from the side of the bed, where he had been silently attending on the patient, and asked, in a low voice, if Mrs Frederick Atterbury was in the house ?

'Yes, sir, she is,' said Miss Craggs ! 'but nobody can see her, unless it be indeed by medical orders, in which case I say nothing, of course, never thinking it right to set up my judgment against the doctor's.'

'Bring her to me,' said the voice from the bed. There was such a strange solemnity in the slow, solemn tones, that all present listened with fear. Compton went to consult Miss Clavering, still lingering on the staircase ; but before they

could decide, the door overhead opened quickly, and Eleanor came down, looking so terrified by the strange sounds she had heard, that Anne was obliged to tell her the truth directly. She had imagined something so much more dreadful, that, shocked as she was, it was comparatively a relief, and she went instantly to the sick man's bed.

'I am sorry to see you like this, Mr Martock. Is there anything I can do for you?'

He fixed his dull eyes on the young face whose bloom he had helped to wither; and made a desperate effort to speak—though what he would have said no one ever knew. Consciousness remained, and the wish and the will to do something—distressing, almost terrible to see—but the long misused power was gone for ever, and though his eyes gazed at Eleanor, in almost supplicating agony, they could do nothing more. She bent over him, she put her ear to his lips, she tried to read his signs; for she knew well how fearfully valuable these moments were, and would have done anything to give him the opportunity his eyes seemed to implore. 'Can you follow us if we pray for you?' she said, finding all her efforts fruitless; 'can you make a sign to show you throw yourself on the Saviour's mercy?'

Alas! for that, too, the hour was past. His eyes closed, and made no sign.

'You had better retire, madam,' said the surgeon, at last, gently removing her from the bedside. 'He can neither see nor hear you now, and cannot last many hours.'

She yielded, so faint with the agitation of such a scene, that she could hardly see or hear herself at the moment. She did not know that Anne and Mrs Tresham had already quitted the room, nor did she observe that Compton courteously made way for the stranger, as he advanced with the air of one who had a right to accost her, and drew her arm in his. She clung to him for support, and he was rather alarmed to feel how she trembled.

'God forgive him—God forgive him as I do!' she repeated, as if thinking aloud, hardly aware that she was overheard. 'Oh! to see death like this!—how should we meet it if it came on us so suddenly?'

The arm on which she leant trembled as much as her own.

'There have been those as young as you, to whom it has been a passage to glory,' he returned in a low voice, that seemed strangely familiar; but before she could even conjecture why it was, he went on to inquire gravely, what the invalid had been to her? 'I can see he was not your friend.'

'He was the only man I ever feared—the first who taught

me what it was to have an enemy. I have dreaded so often what he might yet do—and now——’

‘He will injure you no more. No enemy shall ever terrify you again—if I can prevent it.’

She drew her arm from his, recollecting for the first time that she was speaking to a stranger. ‘Excuse me, sir, but I do not know why——’

She stopped short, looking at him in astonishment. Now that she could see his face, an undefined resemblance to the cherished image of her father made her heart bound with sudden hope. He held out both hands, and his kind, sweet smile as he saw her thoughts, showed her she had hoped aright. ‘I did not mean to startle you, or, indeed, to intrude at all just at present, but since we have met, Eleanor, let your cousin stand by you now; it may be a comfort to have one at hand who dearly loved your father.’

‘It is you, then, Mr Ormonde! Oh, how I have thought of you—longed to see you—longed to give you comfort—and now you have come—at what a moment!’

‘I know—I know,’ he said, drawing her to him affectionately, ‘we have both suffered enough to feel for each other, and come what may, I will never forsake you. Your home henceforth——’

He was interrupted by her start; there was a sound in the passage that made her hurry to the door. There stood Herbert Tresham, panting and breathless, and on either side of him, his mother and Anne. ‘Mrs Atterbury!’ he almost sobbed, seizing her hand, ‘Mrs Atterbury! Will you forgive me for my news?’

She stood motionless; frightened by his violent agitation.

‘You will believe me, won’t you, that I would have undone my own work if I could? The fellow took me in, I was never more miserable in my life than when I found how I had been hoodwinked. I have hated myself ever since, I never dared come near you, till I brought something to make amends; and now, will you say you forgive me, and then I shall hold up my head again? Oh, mother—what is the matter? she does not speak!’

‘You have startled her—she does not understand,’ said Mrs Tresham. ‘Dear Mrs Atterbury, my poor boy has run all the way to be the first to tell you all is happily over!’

‘He is saved, saved, Eleanor,’ whispered Anne, passing her arm round her waist, and kissing her cheek, ‘saved to make you happy for many a year, I trust. So bravely as you have borne sorrow, try and be courageous against joy!’

She did her best; she struggled to be calm and glad, but her brain was too dizzy to realize anything, and she never knew how long the interval was, nor how it passed, between the moment of her hearing of her husband's acquittal, and that of her finding herself upstairs, with her head resting on his bosom.

Mr Ormonde lost no time in conveying his young relations to more comfortable apartments. Childless and wealthy, his heart had yearned over Eleanor, as one of the last of his race; and it was chiefly on her account, that as soon as his health would permit, he had hastened over to England. Her letter had reached him just before his own calamity; and when he was so ill as to doubt of his recovery, he had borne her petition in mind, and stirred up his friends to work for hers. In consequence of this, she had the comfort of announcing to Mrs Tresham a promise of a chaplaincy for Charles Lyle; and of arranging, to their mutual satisfaction, the term on which she was to receive the children of a rich and liberal gentleman, who had empowered Mr Ormonde to do so at once. The remuneration being in proportion to his station and requirements, would go far towards restoring to the widow the comforts she had lost; and though the idea of sending Clara to India made her shudder, yet, as the young people themselves rejoiced, she could not but enter into their joy, and prepare with a thankful heart for her new and welcome duties.

If Mr Ormonde could have kept his kinswoman near him, he would have given up India entirely, and made any sacrifice to enable Atterbury to live in England. But the advice of both physician and lawyer was hostile to such a hope. A British winter must be avoided for the wife—an idle life for the husband. On this latter point Atterbury was resolute. Any assistance towards satisfying his creditors, and enabling him to begin work with a prospect, however distant, of success, he would thankfully accept; he did not care what the work was, nor where it was, so long as the climate suited Eleanor; but nothing should induce him to go on eating the bread of another, or spend an hour longer in idleness than he could possibly help. No one could deny that he was right, and a long sea voyage being pronounced as Eleanor's best chance, the result of much anxious discussion was the adoption of Mr Clavering's plan: they were to go to Australia.

Atterbury's sufferings had not left him unscathed. He was an altered man; his youth and his recklessness were gone alike, and he never could forget how he had stood to hear his father's

honour blasted, and only barely saved his own. The anguish inflicted on that father by his enemy, never really understood till the revelations of the trial had so deeply stung the son, that it was with vengeance in his heart he left his prison ; palpitating with keen desire to punish the man who had caused such unutterable misery. It was no small shock to be taken by Mr Clavering into the darkened room, where the dreaded enemy lay, and to hear how terrible a vengeance had already fallen, without his lifting a hand. Passion and indignation were disarmed in that silent presence, and he owned with contrite humility that it was only of God's mercies that he, too, had not utterly fallen, as, but for Eleanor, he must have done long ago.

The tone of public opinion had so changed of late, that not only was there a strong demonstration of sympathy for the wife, whose conduct had been pronounced, on high authority, as beyond praise, but Mr Ormonde's endeavours to arrange Frederick's affairs were readily met, and as a large pecuniary sacrifice was offered, no opposition was made to his plan of emigration. It was necessary, if they went at all, that they should go soon, to save Mrs Atterbury from the approaching season ; and their passage was secured, in a vessel that was to sail the end of November. They were to take out letters from Rupert Clavering to his partner, and Atterbury was looking forward to the freedom and adventures of a farming life. Eager to be doing something, to be repaying some part of his obligations, the exile from his native land appeared a slight evil to those from which he had escaped, and the only prospect he could not face without flinching, was the uncertainty of Eleanor's health.

Mr Martock's death was not without its consequences to many. The wealth he had amassed, but never enjoyed, passed into the hands of a nephew, a plain, upright man in the north of England, who had never received a sixpence from his uncle, and was not at all prepared, either for the large inheritance, or the obloquy that accompanied it. He did his best to remove the stain, by refunding such sums as he could discover to have been iniquitously obtained ; and Atterbury's creditors, among others, reaped the benefit of this integrity. The unhappy debtors of Mr Martock, of whom there was a melancholy list in his private books, were also the better for the change, Sir John Pierpoint being among the number. The extent to which he had been shackled, hand and foot, was palliation enough of his conduct to win Eleanor's pardon ; and for her sake, Mr Ormonde extended to him a generous assistance, to which he by no means considered him entitled.

Mrs Atterbury never recovered the rest of her trinkets. Adam contrived to elude all attempts at his apprehension. The story told by Lockwood about the bracelet was true in all its essential points, and the bracelet itself had come into the hands of the police the very day that Herbert sent for him. The narrow escape from detection at the pawnbroker's probably made him more wary, for nothing was learned of his fate till two or three years later, when Mr Clavering heard of a man answering his description having died of a lingering complaint in an hospital in Liverpool, who expressed great penitence for his past sins, and had only one article in his possession that showed signs of his having seen better days—a small clasped Bible, in a binding that had been handsome once, on whose fly-leaf were the initials in a clear, womanly hand, E. M. A.

The engagement of Sophia Cummings with Mr Compton was nearly settled before they left Brussels, and was now an acknowledged fact. How young Blatherwick bore it, nobody seemed to think it necessary to inquire, as his uncle seemed perfectly satisfied. Mrs Cummings could not thwart her darling child, and took the man of Sophia's heart at once into her own. She did more, she took him into her house too—a house in a well-sounding street in town, whither she had repaired with her whole family for the winter, and where, in the most pressing terms, she invited her aunt and Arthur to pay her a visit. For the sake of seeing more of Mrs Atterbury, they consented; and under Compton's genial superintendence, there was no fear now of their being victims of careful management. He and his mother-in-law elect were on the best terms imaginable, each firmly believing in the blind submission of the other—a happy state of things which one could only hope would last.

'Times are changed with me now,' said Eleanor to Anne, one day, when the latter had been arranging a variety of matters connected with her outfit, for which she herself had no strength; 'it seems almost strange that others should be working so diligently at my wardrobe, when Mrs Compton that is to be, has so much of my handiwork in hers. I hope Milly will go on improving; she was here this morning, and very affectionate and kind. I have been writing to Mrs Fenton. She has forgiven me by this time for my want of confidence. If her husband does carry out that plan he mentioned yesterday when he called, of accepting a church in our colony, I may be able to return some of their kind hospitality: only they must not put it off too long.'

Anne stopped in her employment of filling a neat work-box with materials, and sitting down by her friend, rebuked the words by a caress.

'Nay, I am not morbid, or frightened about myself. I know I cannot live long, but I am in loving hands, and shall be as near heaven there as here, or at quiet, peaceful Shal-leigh. Think of me sometimes there; I have given you trouble enough to prevent my being easily forgotten. I can never, never repay you—that is impossible; but living or dying, I shall love you, thank you always. You know,' she continued, after a short silence, 'our last arrangement—that Herbert Tresham goes out with us?'

'Edward was telling me this morning. He thinks it will be the saving of him, especially under your husband's eye, as he is too rash and easily led to be trusted alone.'

'And Mr Wilton is just the man to trust my husband. He knows him as if they had been friends for years. Frederick looks on Herbert as a sacred charge already, and if ever one brother watched another, he will watch him.'

'And who will watch you, if you are ill on the voyage? You may be right in refusing to take a maid, but I own I am anxious about your comfort.'

'I forgot to tell you, I shall have a friend on board, who will do anything for me. Mr Clavering has arranged it all. That poor Mrs Mackay, whose husband's pardon he got in the winter, has been invited by a brother, who has made money in the gold-fields, to go out to him with her family, and as he has sent them the means, they will be our fellow-passengers, and she is to look after me if I require it. I saw her this morning, and if you had seen her delight at the idea of doing something for me, though we neither of us know what, you would have no fear of my being neglected.'

'I have no fear of your not being loved by everybody. I am growing quite jealous of my uncle's fondness for you. He actually talks of going out himself next year, to wind up affairs, as he pretends, but I know it only means, to see if you are well and happy. I wonder what he thinks I am to do meanwhile!'

'Is it possible,' thought Eleanor, 'that she does not imagine?'

She longed to speak her thoughts, but had not courage, nor was she certain that it would be wise. When alone once more with her friend Arthur, she gave vent to her earnest wish that the two to whom she owed so much might be rewarded in each other.

'I wish it too,' he said, 'though as Wilton would never consent to be an idle gentleman, and there is not employment for two at Lawleigh, it would cost us Miss Clavering's company,—a loss for which we are ill prepared. But for her happiness one would put up with worse evils, and I, for one, shall not miss either of you long.'

She put her hand on his, but made no reply.

'Yes,' he went on, 'we are both bound on a long voyage, Mrs Atterbury, and across a stormy sea, but I think we shall meet when it is over. You remember our favourite song :

The friends gone before us,  
At home we shall find them.

It may be hard to say which will arrive first, but the same hope will go with us, and the same Father waits for us there. But for the comfort of that belief, I do not know how I could have parted with such a friend as you. As it is, I shall hear nothing so sweet as your music—until we meet again.'

The last day came ; the last preparations were completed ; and Atterbury, who had been hard at work all the morning, came into his wife's room to see if there were anything she wanted him to do, but found her sitting at the table, so intent on an old drawing-book lying open before her, that she did not hear his entrance. He looked over her shoulder, and as she perceived he was near, their hands met in a close, meaning pressure. Well they both remembered the day when his pencil had traced those sketches, whose subject she had so little fathomed at the time ; well could they both read the moral, of the burden borne in silence under the show of prosperity—the remorse transformed into penitence through the hope kindled by faithful love—the struggle with the powers of evil that urged to despair—the beckoning hand of mercy encouraging to proceed—all was clear to Eleanor now, clear as the belief deeply seated in her heart, that her bondsman too had been rescued by a miracle not the less gracious, because it is wrought every hour.

'One picture is still wanting, Frederick,' she said, at last ; 'we ought to have the deliverance.'

He drew the paper hastily to him, took a pencil from his travelling case, and sketched a group of three figures, of a beauty that surprised himself. Nature had meant him for an artist of no small power, and he had the gift of expressing a likeness with a few easy touches, that so often far exceeds elaborate portraiture. The humbled penitent's face was



hidden in his hands; but that of the wife, whose arm was thrown over him as he knelt, was turned to heaven—calm, peaceful, and satisfied—while over her was an angel form, extending a pitying hand as if in benediction of both. It was only an outline, but there was no mistaking for whom they were meant; and gentle tears, such as that angel's self might have wept, fell from Eleanor's eyes on that graceful image of her rival—which she laid aside among her treasures, never to be parted with while she lived.

And so to their new home they sailed; he, chastened and saddened by the remembrance of the past, yet strong in hope, and earnest in purpose for the future; she, without a fear for the risks that she knew, or for those as yet untried; bearing that about with her that was more than country or home; finding all she desired of this world's good in her husband's presence—all her soul could ask or want in the Presence that went with her, and gave her rest.

Our tale is nearly told; the reader has long since foreseen all that remains to tell.

The dearest wish of Uncle Rupert's heart, next to the redemption of Lawleigh, was to see Edward and Anne united; but even his sanguine nature had at one time nearly abandoned hope. How soon they all began to hope again, it were hard to say; still harder to determine how and when Anne first ventured to read her own heart, and admit that what she had told herself was only cousinly regard, esteem, and friendship, had become affection, that craved the avowal she had once seemed to shun. We only know that his constancy and unselfishness deserved their reward, and that it proved even beyond his dearest anticipations. Their marriage, like everything else, brought its drawbacks with it: Wilton's home is necessarily in London, and Lawleigh sees its heiress only at intervals; but their happiness, when we heard of them last, was as pure as any earthly good can be; and the memory of past trials bears the fruit it is ever meant to bear—the grateful sense of the guiding mercy, that ever makes a pathway for those that follow it, even through the DEEP WATERS.

THE END.



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